FOUR COLOR

MAGAZINE

FOR COMIC BOOK CONNOISSEURS

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER, 1986 VOLUME 1, NUMBER 1 $2.95 (U.S.) $4.25 (CAN.)

THE DC RENAISSANCE

Executive Editor Dick Giordano Discusses His Company's Future

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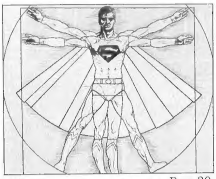

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By David Caruba

point blank

On behalf of the staff, welcome to the first issue of **FOUR COLOR**. This magazine represents over a year's worth of work and we hope you find **FOUR COLOR** to be the finest magazine to enter the market.

As is customary in the very first editorial, let me take a moment and discuss the goals for this magazine. First and foremost, **FOUR COLOR** is a pro-comics magazine. Our staff consists of dedicated comic book collectors and trained journalists. We want the magazine to be entertaining and objective. We make it a point to clearly label our opinions.

FOUR COLOR is aimed at a collector with a knowledge of the direct sales market. The magazine covers the major comic book companies, the independents and, as much as possible, the growing black and white market.

What makes **FOUR COLOR** really special and worth reading is the quality of the articles and spreads in each issue. The comic book medium has a long history and is certainly newsworthy. **FOUR COLOR** captures this spirit and presents it visually. We intend to make the magazine first and foremost entertaining, informative and challenging.

The comic book market is certainly changing. Where once comics attracted children, today they are enjoyed by a variety of age groups, from college students to working professionals. The comics themselves have also changed to reflect an older readership. From **Dark Knight** to **Nexus**, **The 'Nam** to **Crossfire** comic companies are publishing far more mature titles to meet the demands of a more selective readership.

FOUR COLOR Magazine is targeted at this caliber of collector, the connoisseur. Each month we will bring you the latest news, reviews and the finest articles written on the field.

We chose our name to set us apart from other publications that service the market. **FOUR COLOR** is the name of the comic book medium and it also emphasizes our pro-hobby position and our belief that comics are a legitimate art form.

Bill Bradshaw, above, at his London studios. Bradshaw, who painted this issue's front cover, is a long-time comics fan. His next cover is scheduled for ***Four Color #3.***

Let me also take a moment and introduce who we are. We are Paragon Q, the publishers of **Top Secret Magazine.** We humorously refer to ourselves as Maplewood, New Jersey's largest magazine publisher. We are also Maplewood's **only** magazine publisher. We are located close to New York City, allowing us to cover the major east coast companies with ease.

The cover story for this issue, "The DC Renaissance," came from an interview with Dick Giordano at his office. Recalling that the Batman is one of Giordano's favorite characters and is certainly one of the principle revitalizations in DC's line, we approached British artist Bill Bradshaw to draw our cover. Bill, who resides in London, is a highly successful commercial artist. The drawing represents his first comic-related work and we are pleased to introduce him to an American audience.

The final word on whether **FOUR COLOR** meets its goals and fulfills a need is obviously in the hands of the readership. We welcome and encourage feedback. We regret, due to holding a monthly publishing schedule, that we cannot personally reply to each and every letter. However, we do read every word and beginning next issue we will run a letters page and include our responses.

We are also interested in reviewing free-lance submissions. All must be typed and include a phone number and S.A.S.E. For artists, please send photocopies, not originals. Please be patient with us. We will do our best to answer submissions as soon as possible.

Thank you for purchasing **FOUR COLOR**. We hope you enjoy this issue and continue purchasing the magazine. Included in the issue is an insert card for anyone who wishes to subscribe.

David Caruba
November, 1986

news and opinion

n&o

EVANGELINE POINTS HER GUNS FOR FIRST

Charles Dixon and Judith Hunt's **Evangeline** will be returning to comics this January, this time published by First Comics. The series first appeared close to two years ago under the Comico logo, with two issues being published. Lodestone reprinted those two issues recently as an **Evangeline Special**.

"Evangeline is an intergalactic protector of the downtrodden," said Rick Oliver, editor of the series. "Her basic mission is to protect Catholics and religiously downtrodden people throughout the galaxy." To do this, she often employs methods that one may not normally associate with a member of the church. "You really can't get away from the fact that she is a nun with a gun."

Although many issues will have a religious angle to them, Oliver said that not all of her stories will be in such a fashion. The new first issue takes place as Evangeline and Johnny Six are going from one mission to another. Entitled "Dinosaur Farm," the story deals with two heading for "an unchartered planet" inhabited by dinosaurs. This story had been sitting around for "a couple of years," according to Oliver, nearly finished. With it will be four pages of new material to introduce the character to new readers.

The second issue will contain "the first part of Evangeline's origin." This will take Evangeline's early life, before she was recruited by the church. Later in the year, the second part of her origin will appear, detailing the training she received to become what she has become."

Both First and the book's creators have shown a great deal of interest in keeping the series alive. Hunt and Dixon went to court to get the publishing rights from Comico and Oliver had shown interest in the series when it was first being printed. "When the first Comico issue came out two years ago, I personally thought it was the best looking product, outside of the Steve Rude's **Jonny Quest** material, that Comico has ever put out."

Copyright 1986, First Comics, Inc.

***Evangeline** begins her First run with a story entitled "Dinosaur Farm." The inhabitants, dinosaurs, found the run-in explosive.*

***Evangeline** artist Judith Hunt talking shop with **Nexus** artist Steve Rude*

Evangeline may have difficulty in finding an audience due to its erratic publishing history. The series started at Comico, disappearing after two issues. Lodestone reprinted the issues, but their book was delayed five months from its original publishing date. However, none of the inside information, including a features column and a letters page, was updated, leading readers to believe Lodestone would continue publishing the title. Lodestone Publisher David Singer clarified to the press earlier this month that he would not continue producing **Evangeline**.

Although both the title character and the artist are female, Olvier does not expect to draw a large female audience.

TM Eclipse Enterprises Inc.; art © 1986 Tim Truman

FIRST NOTES: **Dreadstar #30** will see the war with the Instrumentality end. As a result, Vanth Dreadstar will suffer a significant loss in powers. "Dreadstar will find himself living in a very new world," said Rick Oliver, the book's editor. "He is living in a galaxy that is sick and tired of super-powered beings that have mucked around with their lives. He is going to find a lot of resentment towards people like him . . ."

Steve Rude will be returning to the art chores of **Nexus** beginning with #33 in January, according to Kurt Goldzung, First Comics' sales director. Under the terms of his new contract, Rude will only be illustrating eight issues a year. The other four will be drawn by a permanent fill-in artist, Paul Smith. Smith is best known for his work on Marvel's **Dr. Strange** and **The X-Men** series.

—Ken Scudder

DC PLANS NEW $1.00 FORMAT

DC Comics has announced they will begin publishing select titles in a new format beginning in January, 1987. Priced at $1.00, this new format that they bill "innovative," will run 32 pages and be printed on Mando paper by an offset press.

"We wanted to offer our readers some comics with higher printing quality without having to go to the deluxe format's $1.50 price tag," said Paul Levitz, executive vice president. Levitz cited Production Manager Bob Rozakis as developing the new format with Ronalds Printing of Canada.

While DC was not specific, they have said the production values of the titles will be higher than the standard 75 cent comic.

The first title in this new format will be Doug Moench's and Gene Colan's monthly **Spectre** series. Several other titles are expected to follow in early 1987.

While **FOUR COLOR** applauds any new innovation in production, we question whether consumers will be willing to pay an extra quarter for what is basically 32 pages.

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NORRIN RADD SURFS AGAIN:

Silver Surfer fans take note: Galactus' foremost herald is returning in an all new limited series from Marvel in late December/early January.

"Steve Englehart, Marshall Rogers and Joe Rubinstein are doing it," said Fabian Nicieza of Marvel Comics. "It takes Silver Surfer off Earth and out into adventures in space."

Originally, the sentinel of the skyways was do to return in a graphic novel by Stan Lee. Lee's novel, according to Marvel, was canned because of his "time concerns." Englehart and Rogers were given the go-ahead to produce the series two months ago. Mike Higgins is set as editor.

If the series is successful it will be considered for an on-going series.

In a market innundated with robots, mutants, toys and real American heroes (**G.I. Joe**), lets hope that the younger comic book generation can appreciate one of Marvel's finest classic characters.

MARVEL NOTES (or rather, MUTANT NOTES): In December, **The Avengers Vs. The X-Men** limited series begins. Written by Roger Stern with art by Marc Silvestri and Joe Rubinstein, this four issue mini-series promises to provide lots of mutants beating the tar out of each other, to borrow a Mike Barron expression. In the limited series, Magneto's asteroid crashes to Earth and Magneto, the X-Men, the Avengers and the Soviet Super Soldiers are all after it. We're sure X-fans will be pleased to learn the series is high quality, on baxter paper for a $1.50 an issue . . .

Referring to the Epic series **Bozz Chronicles**, Nicieza said, "At this time there is no plans to continue it. There has been talk of a possible graphic novel, but that has just been discussions. There is not going to be a continuation of this series from #7 at this time. . ."

In other Epic news, Marvel's creator-owned line will be undergoing a reformatting and revitalization of their line slated for late Spring/early Summer. Marvel declined further comment. Details as we hear them . . .

More mini-series coming from Marvel include the cleverly-titled, **Mephisto Vs. The Four Heroes** beginning this December. The four heroes in question are Fantastic Four, Thor, X-Men and X-Factor. Each single issue is scheduled to feature one of the aforementioned. The series is courtesy of Al Milgrom, John Buscema and Bob Wiacek. Observation: Would this series see print without the aid of

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mutants.?

Fallen Angels #1 is an eight issue limited series that will include members of (surprise) The New Mutants plus other heroes and new characters. "It will be a really off-beat group," according to Nicieza. The series is by Jo Duffy, Kerry Gamill and Tom Palmer. . .

In non-mutant offerings comes **Strange Tales #1** in December. "The series returns the old Marvel split book format," according to Nicieza. The book will feature Cloak and Dagger in one 11 page story and Dr. Strange in the other. The Cloak and Dagger team will be Bill Mantlo, Bret Blevins and Terry Austin. The Dr. Strange team will include Peter Gillis, David Warner and Mark Emberlin.

TWO COMICO TITLES SELL OUT

"The new **Grendel** series, issues #1 and #2 are complete sellouts," said Bob Schreck, Comico's administrative director. "They are being resolicited for a reprint. They are completely gone and #2 hasn't even shipped yet!" Explaining why #2 sold out, Schreck said that Comico prints according to orders from distributors. Because #1 sold well, retailers reordered additional copies of #2, causing the situation.

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Grendel, written by creator Matt Wagner with art by Arnold and Jacob Pander with Jay Geldof continues the storyline that appeared previously as a back-up feature in **Mage**. **Grendel**, a monthly, is printed in four color.

"I cannot say enough about **Grendel's** creative team," said Diana Schutz, editor in chief. "Matt has done a beautiful job on the script and Arnold, Jacob and Jay have produced some of the most unique and beautiful artwork ever seen in a comic format."

Schreck said he hopes the popularity of the new **Grendel** series leads to a sell out of **Grendel: Devil By The Deed**, a re-presenting of the **Grendel** back-up features in **Mage**. The full color graphic novel shipped to retailers on October 17, 1986.

Schreck also said that **Robotech: The Graphic Novel** that was released in September has sold out. Comico is rushing the graphic novel back to press to reach retailers in time for the Christmas rush. Written by Mike Baron from a Carl Macek plot, pencilled by Neil Vokes and inked by Ken Steacy, the 48 page full color novel tells the story of the Robotech saga.

COMICO RECEIVES NATIONAL MEDIA ATTENTION

MTV viewers on Friday, October 17, were surprised to find that V.J. Alan Hunter deviated from his normal Ocean Pacific wardrobe to host his on-air segment wearing a **Mage** t-shirt. Hunter concluded his spot with a commentary on **Mage**. Hunter displayed #9, holding the issue toward the camera.

"Mr. Hunter said the shirt was 'really cool' and stated how proud he was to be wearing it," said Bob Schreck of Comico. "He then held our product on camera and spoke for at least two minutes on the **Mage** material. He thanked creator Matt Wagner for bringing **Mage** to his attention and mentioned that he felt the book's main character, Kevin Matchstick, resembled his fellow video jockey, Dweezil Zappa."

OPINION: One can only assume that next on the celebrity endorsement list is Diamond David Lee Roth. The next time you see Mr. Lee Roth's video for "Yankee Rose," watch out for that Robotech headband!

Returning to the topic of Comico media attention, the new graphic novel **The World of Ginger Fox** has appeared in a graphics magazine and **Philadelphia Magazine**.

Schreck added, "So far the few direct-market retailers and warehouse managers who've seen **Ginger** have been very enthusiastic about the project. I am certain that once the retailer puts **Ginger** on display, it will fly out of the shops. It is one of the best written, most incredibly illustrated graphic novels you'll ever read."

Created and written by Mike Baron,

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with art by Mitch O'Connell, coloring by Les Dorsheid and lettering by L. Lois Buhalis, **The World of Ginger Fox** is a 64 page full color graphic novel. The story involves a young female advertising executive who is thrust into the glamour and intrigue of Hollywood when she is called upon to save a major movie studio from bankruptcy.

The World of Ginger Fox is scheduled to ship at the end of November and is priced at $6.95.

COMICO NOTES: Writer Markalan Joplin and inker Mike Chen will join penciller Mike Leeke as the regular creative team on **Robotech: The Macross Saga** beginning with issue #18. "In my opinion, Joplin brings a fresh and intelligent approach to both the characters and storylines," said Editor In Chief Diana Schutz. "I'm sure our readers will notice the difference." Inker Mike Chen, who teaches at the Joe Kubert School of Cartoon and Graphic Art, has pencilled DC's **World's Finest**, **Warlord**, **Blue Devil** and **M.A.S.K.**. .

Fathom, one of the characters from the **Elementals** series, will be featured in a three issue mini-series. Cleverly titled **Fathom**, the series will be written by Lawrence Schick and pencilled by Jill Thompson under he supervision of **Elementals** creator Bill Willingham. The series begins with Fathom, Rebecca Golden, attending her high school class reunion. The series next takes Fathom to sea, where she experiences adventure. According to Willingham, the story also involves her **Elementals** teammate Monolith as well as the team's butler, Lawrence. Schick has written articles for **Dragon** and **Twilight Zone** magazines as well as having done extensive work as an editor of role-playing and computer games. Ms. Thompson, the penciller, has previously contributed artwork to **Villains and Vigilantes** gaming modules and a "Munden's Bar" back-up in First Comics' **Grimjack**. . .

The first issue of the new **Justice Machine** monthly series beginning in January will be written By Tony Isabella and illustrated by creator Mike Gustovich. The series will pick up where the **Justice Machine Featuring The Elementals** mini-series left off, according to Comico. Gustovich said the new series will begin with a storyline dealing with the Justice Machine's choice between life on their home planet, Georwell, and Earth. In the course of their travels, the team will happen upon a comic book convention. "They don't seem out of place," added Gustovich. "Many people there are dressed in flamboyant costmes. . ."

Space Ghost, star of the Hanna-Barbera animated series of the same name, will be revived in a special one-shot, 48 page square-bound novel in 1987. The series will be written by Mark Evanier of **DNAgents** fame and drawn by Steve Rude of **Nexus**, who will also serve as co-plotter. Painted color will be provided by Ken Steacy. Rude said the special "will look as much like the show as possible." He said he plans to present a large-scale adventure involving numerous villains and locales. **Space Ghost** premiered on television in September of 1966. The space-based adventurere traversed the galaxy with his youthful companions Jan, Jace and pet monkey Blip. All are expected to appear in the special. . .

Space Ghost Copyright 1986 Hanna-Barbara

On the **Jonny Quest** front, Comico has extended its licensing agreement with Hanna-Barbera Productions to continue producing a monthly series. Originally planned as a 12 issue limited series, overwhelming response convinced Comico to keep the series alive. "We've been deluged with letters thanking us for bringing back these beloved characters in such excellent stories," said Schreck. "We see no reason not to continue the saga." Doug Wildey, who set the look and feel of the original television series and contributed the cover and lead story to the first issue will return to paint wrap-around covers for issues #7 and #12, December, 1986 and May, 1987 respectively. . .

While on the topic of **Jonny Quest**, Wordvision Enterprises will begin releasing episodes on video tape. Each tape, retailing for $19.95, will contain two full-length episodes from the original animated series. The original television series, along with 12 new episodes, can be seen as part of the **Funtastic World of Hanna-Barbera** syndicated television program, presently airing on Sunday mornings in major TV markets.

ECLIPSE TURNS TO BLACK AND WHITE

Eclipse Comics, well known for their color line of comics, has recently decided to convert a good portion of their titles to black and white. "With the black and white explosion of recent months, the speculative hysteria has pretty much died down. What seems to be happening is that high quality black and whites are selling at a higher level than they were before all this nonsense began," said Jim Friel,

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Eclipse sales manager.

An excellent example of the high quality b/w titles that Friel refers to is Scott McCloud's **Zot! Zot!** will return in January as a bi-monthly baxter series, with issue #11. **Zot!**, in its original 10 issue color run, was highly praised by fandom. One of its strongest attributes was its synthesis of art and color. When asked why the decision was made to return **Zot!** in black and white, Friel answered, "In color it was losing big money. In order to make money in color you have to sell two to three times as many as you need to sell to make really quite decent money in black and white. Scott [McCloud] was starving, we were losing money on the book, so it was canceled by mutual consent. We didn't cancel it over Scott's objections. It was a profiteering arrangement and there were no profits."

Zot! surrounded the adventures of a youthful super hero from an alternative Earth who befriends a lonely Earth girl named Jenny. Jenny, her brother (who is unceremoniously transformed into a chimp!) and Zot set off on a quest for a key that opened a mystical door. The series was well known for its original and stylized storytelling freshly done by McCloud. **Zot!** ended its initial run with #10.

McCloud, who has taken over a year off from his character (with the exception of a mini-comic) has most recently produced the one-shot over-sized black and white, **DESTROY!!**. **DESTROY!!**, much to the amusement of the industry, was dedicated to mindless violence and senseless destruction in the medium.

Another highly acclaimed color series scheduled by Eclipse to return as a black and white is Mark Evanier's and Dan Spiegle's **Crossfire**. Beginning again in January, the series will also be printed on Baxter paper. "I think Dan Spiegle's work is going to look great in black and white," said Friel. For more information about Crossfire, we direct your attention to the article, "A Masked Man In Locustland," found elsewhere in this issue.

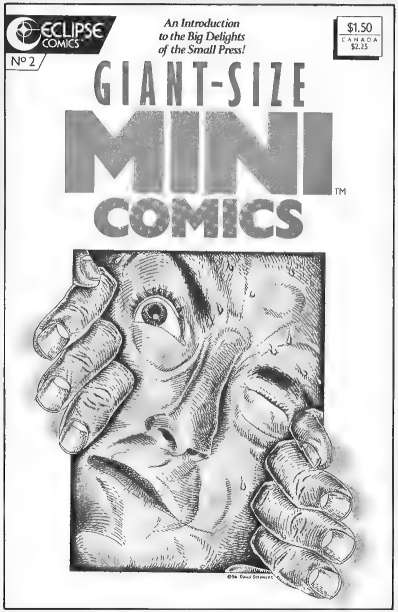
Other black and white titles forthcoming from Eclipse include **Guerrilla Groundhog**; **The Dreamery** and **Fusion**, alternating bi-monthlies featuring the work of Lela Dowling; **Portia Prinz of the Glamazons** by Richard Howell; and Ty Templeton's **Stig's Inferno**, previously a Vortex title. All of these black and white titles will be on baxter paper.

Friel summerized by commenting, "Our color books still out-number our black and whites. We do have a hell of a lot of black and white titles right now."

ECLIPSE NOTES: Consumers, get your Eclipso-vision glasses ready! In January comes a reprint from the 1950s, **Lars of Mars In 3-D**. This is the first time this Jerry Seigel and Murphy Anderson story has been printed with extra-dimensional aid. For those who enjoy the added depth that Ray Zone brings, Eclipse offers in February **Scout #16** in 3-D. Writer/artist Tim Truman promises an all-fight issue but won't reveal who Scout is fighting with. It is interesting to note that this is the first time Eclipse has printed a 3-D issue within a series as opposed to printing it as a special edition...

Also coming soon from Eclipse is a **Villains and Vigilantes** four issue miniseries. Written by Jack Herman with art by Jeff Dee and Ron Wagner, the series is under consideration to become an on-going title. The title is, of course, based on the popular role-playing game...

Finally, **Airboy** is due for a change in



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co-pilots. Beginning in #17 Bo Hampton pencils two issues and will be followed by new regular artist Ron Randall (from DC's **Warlord**). Chuck Dixon will continue to write **Airboy** as well as the "Skywolf" back-up series.

FANTA-GRAPHICS OFFERS PRIME CUTS

"**Prime Cuts** is a on-going bi-monthly comics anthology magazine that will be devoted to publishing comics on the cutting edge of the comics medium," according to Kim Thompson of Fantagraphics. "Basically, innovative, strange, out of the mainstream kind of stuff."

Thompson presented an impressive list of contributors who have committed to at least one project each. The list includes Robert Crumb, Michael T. Gilbert, Alex Toth, Jaime Hernandez, Drew Freedman, Justin Green, Gilbert Hernandez, Eddie Cambell, Phil Elliott, Susan Catherine, Jack Jackson, Richard Sala, William Messner-Loebs and many others.

While Thompson could not clearly define the difference between **Prime Cuts** and **Anything Goes**, he indicated **Prime Cuts** is more open and avante garde. The biggest difference between the two is that contributors will be paid for **Prime Cuts**.

For those who are unaware of Fantagraphics' legal concerns, proceeds from **Anything Goes** are put towards legal costs stemming from challenges to various **Comics Journal** articles and comments. Many top creators in the comics industry donated stories.

FANTAGRAPHICS NOTES: **Flesh and Bones #4** concludes the erratically printed Dalgoda mini-series. The final issue ships December. "Essentially, **Flesh and Bones** is set up as a roughly 90 page novella that will conclude the saga of Dalgoda in a fairly conclusive manner," said Thompson...

With regards to its back-up series, "The BoJeffries Saga," Alan Moore and Steve Parkhouse will be doing some future installments, most likely in **Prime Cuts**, according to Thompson. Thompson indicated the idea behind more BoJeffries Saga installment is to compile them into an album. The wait for the album may be a long one. To date there are only 30-odd pages...

Only one new title is planned from Upshot Graphics, Fantagraphics' color adventure line. **Dinosaur Rex** is a three issue mini-series written by Jan Strnad and drawn by Henry Mayo. Thompson describes the series as a comedy adventure that takes place in a cross between P.G. Wodehouse's England and the jungle with dinosaurs. The series is schedule to come out monthly, beginning in January...

Regarding Upshot Graphics, Thompson said, "Upshot is sort of in a state of flux right now. We are not sure what's going to wind up under Upshot and what is not going to wind up under Upshot."

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THE DC RENAISSANCE

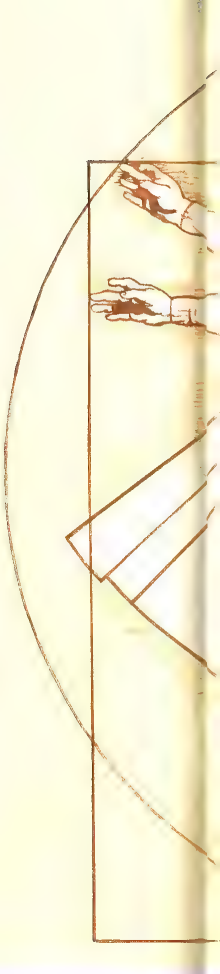
Streamlined And Updated, Comics' Oldest Company Sets Its Sights On The Future

Easily the most talked about company in the past two years has been DC Comics. Titles such as **Dark Knight**, **Watchmen**, **Amazing Man** and **Swamp Thing** have brought the company critical acclaim and perhaps even more important, respect within the industry. Where once DC was classified as simply the number two company in the business, today it is classified as being on the cutting edge–the company willing to take financially risky chances to broaden their product line.

DC was not always so impressive. When Dick Giordano became executive editor in 1980, the once great company was in trouble. Faced with loss of sales and creative stagnation, Giordano and Publisher Jenette Kahn formulated a five year plan to turn the ailing company around. While it has taken six years so far, DC has succeeded in redefining their universe and revitalizing their flagship titles

FOUR COLOR visited Giordano at DC's offices high above Fifth Avenue in New York City. He is a pleasant man, warm and surprisingly open about his company. Giordano, whose black hair and moustache are beginning to silver, is attired in a brown blazer. Far from the image of a task-master or a big business executive, Giordano admits that much to his chagrin, most of his

By David Caruba



Superman is Copyright, DC Comics Inc.
Illustration by Bill Bradshaw

"How much violence was real in Dark Knight is what makes the difference if you come right down to it. How much Batman felt he had to take the law into his own hands, which was controlled by the fact that the lawless element had gotten out of hand."

staff considers him the epitome of a nice guy. He is certainly easy to address, although when he raises his voice to drive home a point it is obvious that, in his own words, "the buck stops here." Little escapes his attention and scrutiny.

Surrounded by the latest covers hanging on his wall, original art, shelves of books (including volumes of the **DC Style Guide**), momentoes (the most striking being a framed drawing of Captain Carrot painted on different levels of glass to convey a feeling of depth) and stacks of projects awaiting his attention, Giordano is well at ease. Reclining in his chair he discusses the direction DC is headed in 1987.

FOUR COLOR: Where is DC targeting their comics?

GIORDANO: DC is aiming its product at an older reader. It started out almost as an accident and has become a direction for us. Rather than struggle to compete with Marvel for its obviously younger audience, we have decided to stnke out on our own and get a different audience. In so doing, if we are able to interest that audience segment, we will certainly make ourselves available to the Marvel audience as they grow out of that particular kind of product.

Marvel has been very, very successful with that younger reader. I don't know what that age level is now, it has been going up through the years. I think there is a need on the part of a youngster to belong to a group of peers. If most of them read Marvel Comics, they'll all read Marvel Comics. There certainly is a lot of stuff there for that reader.

We've never been able to do quite as well with that particular market segment as Marvel has, no matter what we've done. The only way one thinks of to break into that market is to produce the kind of material that already exists. And there is no way we are going to do Marvel as well as Marvel.

The most obvious strategy for us became, why don't we just go and look for our own audience? These [comics] are things that appeal to us as adult comic readers and we'll see if we can't appeal to that older audience. Of course, with the exception of John Byrne's **Superman** that still makes inroads to that younger audience, everything we've done this year that has been even reasonably successful has been aimed at the older audience, **Watchmen**, **Dark Knight** and **The Shadow**. We seem to have been fairly successful reaching that audience and getting some sort of critical acclaim.

We expect that to be the approach the company takes for the next few years. We are scheduled deep into '87 and almost up to '88 and more of that material will follow this approach.

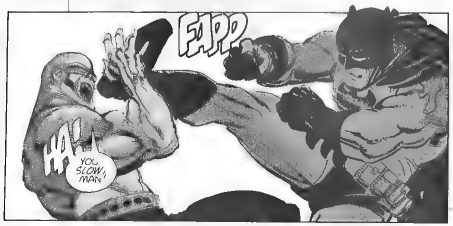
FOUR COLOR: 1986 seems to be the year DC has redefined and pumped new life into their flagship titles. Was there a specific point when you and your staff decided to do so?

GIORDANO: Yes, but like most decisions go that sort of grew. The decision really started four years ago this coming February [February, 1983]. We were on a retreat and I approached Jenette [Kahn] with the idea of revitalizing Superman. I said, "I believe there isn't any way for us to go but down in sales with the character." She agreed with that. We thought we needed to bring the character up to the '80s

The time-lapse between the first discussion and when it actually occurred was considerable–three years. It was basically because of our inability to find the right people and the right ideas to make that change. There were a number of people–and I won't mention too many names in deference to their sensibilities–who have presence and are in the marketplace today, who came to us with proposals. For one reason or another either they would not be able to do it under our terms or we would not be able to do it under their terms.

For a number of reasons, until John Byrne came along, we couldn't find the right changes to make with the right creative team, something that we thought would have long-ranging effect. John had often mentioned doing **Superman** to me through the years and I totally ignored him because he was under **contract**! When, last year, it turned out he was no longer under contract and I was able to talk to him about it, we decided on the Superman revitalization. Quite honestly, everything spun off from that.

We were talking about doing some new things: Hey, we've got a solid revitalization for Superman..what about The Flash? What about Batman? What about Wonder Woman? And what about all the other major characters in the line? They sort of fell on each other in terms of the revitalization. That became the company's policy, let's



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revitalize everything we've got before we look for something new. If we are going to publish these characters, let's make them as good as we can.

Let's make The Flash fun again, and we did. You haven't seen it yet but I have. At this point you'll just have to take my word. The Flash will be fun again to read. Mike Baron has done a fantastic job on working with Wally West as The Flash with a costume that you're very familiar with because it is the same one. A slightly different logo, but a totally different concept in terms of dealing with a super hero whose only power is that he can run fast.

I think you'll enjoy it as much as I did. When I read the first issue I went into Mike Gold [editor] who had started the ball rolling on the project and said go, this is great. I really wasn't enthusiastic about Wally West as The Flash until I saw what could be done with him.

Wonder Woman: George [Perez] knew what John [Byrne] was doing on **Superman** and basically wanted a, "Me too. Hey, he's going to be doing something fun and I want to do something fun too." He [Perez] knew there was probably not going to be any major bucks in it but he wanted to revitalize a major DC hero, **heroine** in this case. You know, women are very hard to sell in comic books. I think if there is a chance to sell **Wonder Woman**, we've done whatever could be done.

We read the first issue, that is 32 pages, and everyone was surprised at how good it was. It is a good story, well drawn, a solid concept. The character will work. Whether people will care or not is another thing.

Green Lantern Corps: The sales on **Green Lantern** have increased substantially since Steve [Englehart] came to it. He started before most of the other revitalizations were officially noted, so that the Green Latern revitalization is sort of retroactive.

FOUR COLOR: You mentioned earlier that you are now aiming your product at an older consumer. Do you have a specific age?

GIORDANO: That's hard to do. The chronological age never seems to work for me. Our marketplace is now defined as the ages between say 12 and 27. The market research was conducted at the direct sales, where our market is these days. I would say the top half of that, 16, 17 and up. We are talking about a 16-year-old who is a little bit more mature than the average 16-year-old at that age. That's why I hate to use chronological ages. I think chronologically we are talking about someone who is in college or older.

I think the great appeal for a **Watchmen** or **Dark Night** is for that older reader. I don't think the 12-year-old would find too much interest in that material. I think it is above them.

FOUR COLOR: Now that **Man of Steel** has been completed, how has reaction been from the industry and the market?

Giordano: The major reaction has to do with sales and the sales exceeded our expectations considerably. The first issue of **Man of Steel** outsold any comic book that we published in the last 25 years and maybe longer than that.

FOUR COLOR: We heard the figure of over a million.

GIORDANO: The print run was over a million. I don't know if the sales were over that. The direct sales, that are etched in stone as non-returnable, are considerably higher than anything I've ever heard of.

FOUR COLOR: In what ways did you see **Man of Steel** significant? Let us tag on to that, why is Superman a better product now?

GIORDANO. **Man of Steel** set out to define what the new Superman would be. If I had to sum up very quickly why Superman is a better product it's because we humanized the character. The major attempt in the revitalization of Superman was to make him somebody you'd like rather than somebody you thought of as a father-figure or deity. We were interested in having him be, if you will, the sort of guy you'd stand at the corner bar and have a beer with. In the first Superman movie you got that feeling about [Christopher] Reeves' interpretation of the character. He was just a nice guy–happened to have a lot of super powers and all that–but he was a nice guy.

The major reason for leaving Ma and Pa Kent alive was that. It is easier to relate to someone who has a mother and father still alive. When he has problems he goes back home to mom and pop. That happened in **Man of Steel**. We want a letter from mom to show up every once and a while. That sort of helps to humanize the chartacter.

Essentially what we're trying to do is depowerize him slightly and humanize him considerably.

"If I had to sum up very quickly why Superman is a better product, it's because we humanized the character."

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In June of '87 there'll be a title appearing called Silver Blade. I consider that something to watch because Silver Blade is new and we're revitalizing the writer in a way. Carey Bates, who has been related to Superman for so long has created something that will dispel any possible ideas that some fans may have had as to his ability to write comic books.

FOUR COLOR: Let us be specific. You are saying the main difference from the previous version of Superman was that he is humanized?

GIORDANO: Yeah.

FOUR COLOR: And that's what is significant about **Man of Steel**?

GIORDANO: **Man of Steel** redefined the character in a lot of different ways, including the fact that Ma and Pa Kent were still alive, including the fact that Superboy no longer exists or Supergirl never happened and so on. What I think the major change long-running, I mean five years into the run, is a more human Superman to deal with. Somebody with a sense of humor, who has some emotional feelings and has a mother and father to talk to. I think that's the residue to come out of this.

FOUR COLOR: Where is **Superman** going next year in his flagship title?

GIORDANO: The major storyline is going to revolve around Lex Luthor. Lex Luthor is the kingpin in Metropolis. The conflicts will continue to appear between the two. Lex's problem these days–is that he was Number One until Superman came along. It has nothing to do with him going bald any more. That, I thought, was kind of silly. It was even silly in the time it was done but it's sillier today!

Lex's concern is, "Hey, this was my town and now this guy came along and messed it up." The competition between the two of them will be that. Lex will discover through the use of his computers that Superman is really Clark Kent. Then he'll say, "Naaa, that can't be." The obvious is **so** obvious that he disbelieves it.

They'll be more of that one piece of Kryptonite that's hanging around. It will be part of the storylines for a few years to come.

Just to give people a little clue, if you go back to **Man of Steel #1** and you note on the last page Superman flying off into the sky for the first time, if you look down into the doorway of the barn you'll see there is a figure watching him take off. He knows who Superman is because he just saw him take off from the Kent's farmhouse.

FOUR COLOR: We didn't notice it.

GIORDANO: I know that, not many people noticed it. I saw it there because I inked the bloody thing! John [Byrne] set it up way back then in **Man of Steel #1**. Also in **Man of Steel #1** you'll see a mysterious figure in one of the panels as a car is driving off in a rainstorm. That too will have bearing later in the year.

FOUR COLOR: Will the same storyline continue in **Adventure**?

GIORDANO: The coordination between the two books is always difficult but Marv [Wolfman] and John [Byrne] are in constant communication. There will be direct tie-ins two or three times a year. By that I mean two or three times a year we will have a storyline that will go from **Superman** to **Adventure** to **Action** and back again. All the rest of the time it will be coordination rather than storylines that run from one book to another. This is to make sure that the time frame between the three books is clear.

FOUR COLOR: Let us rephrase the question. How will **Adventure** be different from **Superman**?

GIORDANO: You can think of **Adventure** as being the second Superman book every month. They'll be closely related in some months and just straightly related in others.

As a matter of fact the artwork on the **Adventures of Superman** is absolutely stunning. Jerry Ordway has decided to ink his own book. Mike Machlan took himself off it–we didn't do it–and Jerry said, "I'll ink it then." Parts of issue #1 were actually inked by Jerry. You can't really tell because the work was in progress and Mike Machlan had done a considerable amount of it. From issue #2 on Jerry will be inking the entire book himself and it's stunning.

FOUR COLOR: Will **Action** be a little more distant from the other Superman titles?

GIORDANO: **Action** will be a little separate from the two. That's why I said the two of them [**Superman** and **Adventure**] can be considered Superman being published twice a month. **Action** will be somewhat different. This is because **Action** is a crossover book and John must feel his way around the character he's not familiar with. It is also very hard to coordinate three books in one month. For the time being we are going to try to coordinate the two. **Action**, while maybe not out of continuity will not be deeply embedded in continuity.

Since the first issue, for example, deals with the Teen Titans, the second with the Phantom Stranger and the third is a tie-in with **Legends** and the other two books, it is very hard to come up with some kind of consistency that holds those three books together. **Action**–this is probably the wrong word to use but it will tell you what we are talking about–is more of a throwaway story. **Action** is important but if you miss it, it won't hurt your enjoyment of the other two books for the month.

Action will propel the character forward, but not the continuity.

FOUR COLOR: You touched on **The Flash**. How will it be different or improved from the previous version?

GIORDANO: The basics tie into the fact that it's Wally West and he's a youngster. The character is not an adult with adult responsibilities. He shares with our reader some of their problems. He's college-age, he has a girl friend and he will find problems attendant to being a super hero

Dick Giordano (the moustached gentleman, direct center) and a good portion of the DC Universe cram into Giordano's office. As executive editor, Giordano describes his job as "part zoo keeper."

who runs fast that we haven't considered before. I don't want to liken it to any other strip because it's not. We're going to examine as closely as we can the effects of somebody who runs very quickly. We've never discussed it: Does it effect his appetite? We think so. How tired does he get compared to how tired do we get? Those are sort of sidebars. I don't mean that is what its all about.

FOUR COLOR: Could you give us an idea what the storyline in the first couple of issues centers around?

GIORDANO: Although there are stories and villains in the first couple of issues, the basic intent of those first two issues is to get the foundation for the series. I'm trying to remember the name of the villain in the first two issues. He's old..he's been around for a long time..he's immortal..he's a Flash villain..he has a name..with two words in it..Vandal Savage!! Thank you, go ahead!!

FOUR COLOR: What happened to the "new Flash" without super speed?

GIORDANO: That was one of our original thoughts on a character. That was a long time ago. When it comes out in the fan press they sometimes report on casual comments that were made six months earlier. Go back to the last issue of **Crisis** and you'll see very clearly that the costume was turned over to Wally West. That's what set it up for us. We decided that we could do the Flash and make him more interesting.

A major element that we just didn't consider until later as being significant enough was the fact that we were changing from Barry Allen to Wally West. We were changing by a decade the age group that the person fit into. That made a substantial difference in the kind of stories we could tell. Wally West is a Teen Titan and that sort of sums it up right there. The younger super heroes seem to be favored by the readers. That in itself doesn't do me a whole lot of good but it opened up new doors for the writer.

It is very hard to convey a feeling that a script can give you about Wally West as the Flash. I suggest that you have to read it before you'd understand some of my enthusiasm for it. My enthusiasm is no less pronounced because we have an artist on it that is going to make something of a difference too.

FOUR COLOR: What is the creative team?

GIORDANO: Mike Gold is the editor, Mike Baron is the writer and a young gentleman who came to us from Marvel is going to do the artwork..!

FOUR COLOR: Would you care to be a little more specific? Just any young gentleman?

GIORDANO: I thought it was in the fan press well before this. Jackson Guise is doing the artwork. Actually, what I think happened is the project seduced him. He called me. It turns out Jackson and Mike [Baron] have wanted to work together for quite a while. My guess would be Mike said, "Hey, I'm going to do **The Flash** for DC" and Jackson called. We'd been in touch before. Jackson Guise used to do some beautiful Batman drawings for a fanzine he worked on before becoming a pro. Because of that I had meant to call him while he was an amateur and offer him a job but Marvel beat me to it.

We've talked to each other, from time to time, through the years. I've sort of said, door's open any time you're interested. Come and give me a call. His contract was up. Evidentally he didn't sign it and called me.

There will be an upcoming issue of **Spotlight On The Teen Titans**. I think it is issue #7, that Jackson Guise is the artist and

Con't on page 49

THE NEVER-ENDING SUPER HERO CYCLE

By Mark Ellis

"Funnybook."

A term now as quaint as "groovy" and "fab." The word derives from the antediluvian days when comic magazines were merely reprints of the newspaper funny pages. In that time, comic books jammed **Flash Gordon** shoulder to-shoulder with **Felix the Cat**. The reading public never expressed disatisfaction with this dichotomy of material; after all, it was only a "funnybook" and there was certainly no stigma attached to perusing the funnies.

Once original features began appearing between the covers, however, the appelation slowly gave way to "comic book." In a short time, "comic book" was synonymous, not with the funnies, but with a single concept, The Super Hero. Before that period, the definition of Super Hero were the pulp adventurers such as The Shadow and Doc Savage. By the early forties, the term was used to describe the bizarre inhabitants of comic books.

It is difficult now to realize just how wildly inventive and innovative the concept of the Super Hero truly was. The men and women who wore masks and capes were far more colorful and far less restrained than their pulp counterparts, but more importantly they had **meaning**.

A Superman For The People

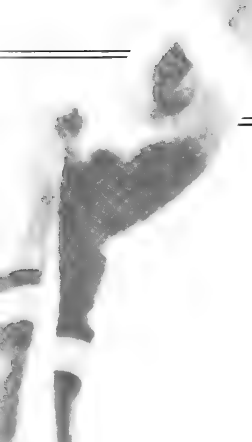
The earliest incarnation of the Super Hero concept was a broad, archetypical representation of the human condition. Superman was a crude but exuberant statement on the plight of the "little fellow" facing the uncertain world of the Depression. The common man blamed the wealthy and the government for their misfortunes. The days were bleak and liberal sentiments ran high. Superman symbolized the frustration of the downtrodden and poverty-stricken. Under the guidance of Siegal and Shuster, Superman squared off against the most obvious results of the Crash of '29.

Since most city-dwellers had no choice but to live in slums and were often forced to steal to survive, Superman destroyed the slums and replaced them with better housing, recognizing that such environments bred criminality.

Wars were never fought by the rich, so Superman went after the corrupt millionaires who started wars for profit. People worked under inhuman conditions for little pay, so Superman accepted the task of improving wretched working conditions, again consisting of the Man of Steel terrorizing members of a corrupt upper class who preyed upon the working stiff. In all instances, these stories were not presented as anomalies in an otherwise smoothly functioning society. On the contrary, the early Superman stories presented society as the great majority of Americans perceived it. The character was such a powerful reflection of the tenor of the times that adults followed his adventures as well as children.

Superman did not become a symbol of the American Way until World War Two

"The Super Team reappeared as the Super Family. The *Fantastic Four,* the *X-Men,* the *New Mutants,* et. al. do not team up to protect the world—they team up for protection *from* the world."



and by that time he was so watered down by diverse hands that even Siegal and Shuster probably had difficulty recognizing their creation. But the Man of Steel sparked the first Super Hero mania, popularly known as the Golden Age of Comics. During the comics "boom" of the '40s, characters in masks and capes appeared and disappeared with a dizzying frequency.

But they were all in some manner a variation of the original Super Hero concept.

It required Stan Lee, Jack Kirby and Steve Ditko to snatch the stale formulas and shake them by the scruffs of their collective neck.

Super villains were rare in those first comics but corruption in high and low places was commonplace. Evil mayors, police commissioners and bureaucrats were all quickly dispatched. The Super Hero was feared, not applauded by the community leaders.

However, as other heroes appeared, the concept was weakened more and more. By the end of the war, the Super Hero had ceased acting the role of fearsome avenger and become the upright Good Citizen. Only children could accept the schoolboy moralizing that now permeated comic books and the adult readership declined sharply. Eventually, even the children grew tired of the concept. Format gave way to simplistic good guy/bad guy formula.

Publishers began experimenting with different premises in which to salvage the Super Hero concept. One of the first and most long-lived of the experiments was to combine heroes into a team. A new concept was born, the major representation being the Justice Society of America. The Super Team was almost as innovative as the Super Hero itself.

Whereas the early Superman was the lone, outlawed avenger, the JSA was similar to a benign rich man's fraternity or secret lodge. Super heroes would meet on a regular basis to exchange anecdotes (and maybe even recipes) but more importantly, to simply hang out with others of their own kind. That was the initial appeal of the Super Team, just "a swell bunch of guys" who got together like neighborhood kids to swap stories and play dress-up.

Like the Super Hero, this first incarnation of the Super Team was quickly diluted. Imitations ranging from the All-Winners Squad to DC's own Seven Soldiers of Victory soon flooded the racks. Another novel format had been reduced to formula

By the early '50s, both the Super Hero and Super Team were so contrived and tiresome that they had all but disappeared. Cowboys, spacemen, psycho-killers and funny animals replaced them. Only the purest versions of the Super Hero survived and then only marginally.

Ironically enough, the newly-imposed Comics Code Authority convinced publishers that the Super concepts were safer commodities than psychos, so they were dusted off for one more tentative try.

Though DC is generally credited with the second resurgence of the Super concepts with their new, streamlined versions of old characters, the formula was still followed that had led to the first disenchantment with the concepts. The art was certainly superior to the earlier incarnations, the scripting a bit more polished but the material was still fairly standard. The excitement and effervescence of the 30s and early 40s just wasn't there.

Marvel Age

It required Stan Lee, Jack Kirby and Steve Ditko to snatch the stale formulas and shake them by the scruffs of their collective neck. New standards for the Super concepts were set in an astonishingly short time. The new definition of the individual super hero became Spider-Man, and though he was not as radical as the early Superman, was so refreshing that he seemed to be. The Super Team resurfaced as the Fantastic Four, the Avengers and the X-Men. Marvel warped the basic Super concepts by simply returning them to their roots – or at least as much as the Comics Code would allow. By reversing DC's trend

of plot over character, Marvel pumped fresh new blood into anemic formats. And the Super concepts were profitable again. At least, for a while.

The old axiom, "Those who do not remember the past are forever condemned to repeat it" is a truism that applies directly to the present state of the comics industry.

Whereas once the Super Hero viewed his unique abilities as a gift, by the early '70s, the Super Hero was cursing his powers as A Pox From On High. This approach was inarguably innovative for a time. Marvel succeeded by combining the Super concepts with slice-of-life scenarios that the young reader could easily relate to, in much the same way that the victims of the Depression related to the deeds of Superman.

However, when other companies borrowed this format for their characters, the revival of the Super concepts degenerated into rehash. Like a mad "keeping up with the Joneses" competition, every super hero was victimized by life's little vagaries,

Super Hero Fraternity

In the '30s and '40s, the Super Hero was intended to represent the best – and occasionally the worst – of humanity. By following Marvel's lead, the concept deteriorated into contrived exercises in angst. Peter Parker has undergone suffering that would make even Job wince in sympathy. At least Job's torments ended, but Peter Parker's will continue as long as readers exchange lucre for the formula.

The Super Team reappeared as the Super Family. The Fantastic Four, the X-Men, the New Mutants, **et. al.** do not team up to protect the world – they team up for protection **from** the world. They battle threats of course, but only because of tradition. The JSA, the JLA and the early Avengers were all Top Guns, mature heroes who joined a team out of expediency. They cooperated with each other because of circumstances. They didn't rely on one other for emotional security or necessarily even live in the same country.

The Super Family, however, has mutated (no pun intended) into small, insular units of youthful paranoics. Titan's Tower, Xavier's School for Gifted Youngsters, etc., often come across as lavishly furnished asylums or ultra-exclusive condos.

And like the Super Team before it and the Super Hero before that, the Super Family has collapsed under the weight of repetition into pat formula. By relying once again on the momentum of a familiar formula instead of novel format, the possibility of the second death of the Super concepts could well be in the near future.

The opening of the direct sales market mid-wived the birth of independent comics publishers, who in turn, birthed more

In a short time, "comic book" was synonymous, not with the funnies, but with a single concept, The Super Hero. Before that period, the definition of Super Hero were the pulp adventures such as The Shadow and Doc Savage.

derivations (and deviations) of the concepts. The opportunity to use the medium as other than a stage for further Super Hero and Super Team permutations was missed by a large percentage of the independents. They compete with DC and Marvel in much the same way cable stations compete with the major networks – not by offering a necessarily better product, just **more** of the product. It is interesting to note that the only independent comic endeavor that has been more than nominally successful is **Elfquest**, a non-Super concept book.

State Of Super Heroes Today

The present situation is uncomfortably similar to that of the '50s. The Super concepts are now stagnating just as they were 30-odd years ago. It's just as boring to read about the Hero As Victim as it was reading about the Hero As Upright Citizen.

But the comic market is vastly different now. If the Super concepts go under because of reader surfeit, so could the entire industry. The awesome diversity of material that existed from the '40s through the mid-'60s just isn't there any longer. No replacements for the Super concepts are waiting in the wings to take the center stage.

Some argue that the only proper place to present the exploits of super people is the comic book, therefore, Super concepts will always be around in some form or another. This is a valid observation, though it is humorous to consider that current Super concept originality is constructed as returning characters to their basics. In other words, to resort back to the initial formula that led to the first demise of the Super concepts (with all due respect to John Byrne's efforts to return Superman to his roots, it is unlikely he will mirror those liberal sentiments that made the Man of Steel an overnight success).

This is not wholly unexpected. Marvel's formula long ago reached its extreme, culminating in the ultimate of Super silliness in **Secret Wars**. There is no way their stable of characters can advance unless they're all committed to mental institutions. DC, though it flirted with Marvel's formula for a number of years, evidently recognized this. The Hero As Victim format never translated well to their characters and in fact seemed rather forced. So, they are scaling away decades of additions and revisions to their fictional universe in an attempt to recapture that elusive magic which so gripped readers of two generations ago.

The "back to basics" approach may work for a time. If it is successful, Marvel and other companies will certainly give it a whirl and the process of formulization will begin anew.

The Long Night of the Super concepts will continue to draw closer.

In the second installment of this forum, the marketing and financial prospectives of super heroes will be addressed.

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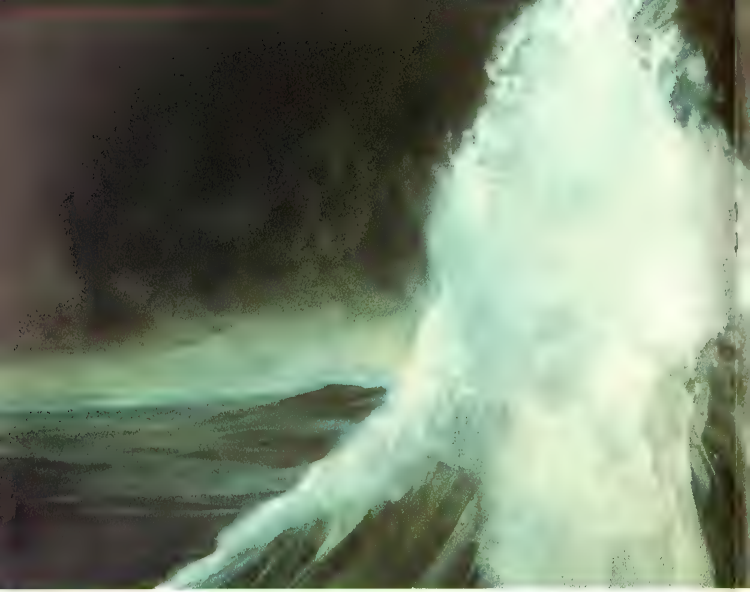

"I want my work to convey larger messages in images. In a lot of ways, dread can be worse than any frank reality."
--Jon Muth

The Dark, Beautiful World of Jon Muth

By Ron C. Thomas

"I want my work to convey larger messages in images than just storyline. In a lot of ways, dread can be worse than any frank reality."

Jon Muth, artist for Marvel's just-released **Dracula** graphic novel and the **Moonshadow** series for Marvel's Epic line, summed up his work that way and it is quite on the mark. Muth is able to move from stark horror and almost revulsion to humor that approaches the slapstick using watercolor techniques that a more ordinary artist might use for paintings of seashores.

Muth's work first came to readers' attention through magazine pieces for **Epic Illustrated**, after the 26-year-old artist moved to New York in 1981 to study painting. However, the **Moonshadow** series has probably drawn more attention to Muth's unique style than anything yet published.

Death...betrayal...war...imprisonment...hypocrisy. Not really the stuff of "funny books," but that was never the intent of Muth and writer J.M. DeMatteis for **Moonshadow**. Rather, Muth stated that, "**Moonshadow** broke new ground in terms of articulate dialogue and artwork, and it was fairly uplifting after the second or third issue." A brief recap of the **Moonshadow** storyline might indicate why it is so jarring to hear this young artist call such subject matter "uplifting."

God-Like Doses

In the series, a race of god-like, unfathomable energy spheres, looking for all the world like "smiley faces" gone mad, abduct a flower child of the 60s, Sheila Fay Bernbaum, also known as "Sunflower." She is placed in a zoo and, later, bears a child sired by one of her zookeepers, known as G'L-Doses. The child she names Moonshadow. In the first issue, Sunflower, Moonshadow, his cat Frodo, and an ill-mannered six-foot teddy bear named Ira escape from the zoo. In the second issue, Sunflower tries to help a pregnant alien deliver a baby on a derelict space ship where the escapees found the alien. As it is born, the baby (a giant, carnivorous caterpillar-mosquito) attacks Sunflower and chews through much of her torso, mortally injuring her. Thus, Moonshadow is orphaned, introduced to the concept of death and left with a scruffy cat and a crude, lecherous, foul-mouthed beast as his only companions.

The remainder of the storyline to date has Moonshadow as a palace slave to a huge slug-like king, drafted into a meaningless war, imprisoned in a mental institution and, later, a prisoner-of-war camp, in-

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troduced to sex in a galactic brothel, and continually betrayed and abused by Ira, his only friend. From time to time, the GT-Doses drop in to intervene with a malicious, mocking delight at Moonshadow's trials.

In dealing artistically with such plot twists, Muth is constantly surprising, no doubt as he intends to be. From panel to panel, he shifts at will from photographic realism to light impressionism to cartooning that might be more at home in **MAD** magazine during its heyday. The shifts from soft washes to harder line techniques serve Muth as special effects like soft focus lenses serve a film director. He keeps his brush-work soft for poignant scenes of grief or sadness and tightens his artwork with stronger colors for the more harsh scenes of violence and horror.

The Artist Himself

In trying to reconcile the art and the artist, **Moonshadow** provides some clues, perhaps, in understanding Muth. Comparing photographs of Muth to his rendition of the Moonshadow character, one is almost overwhelmed by the striking resemblance, bordering on the uncanny. Although the character is 10 years younger, Moonshadow and Muth both share a narrow jaw and hair of similar length and cut.

But it's in the eyes that a real connection is made. Both have eyebrows that seem to stay up in a perpetual state of inquisitiveness and resignation at the same time. It's as though he is seeing everything for the first time but also as though he has seen so much that it weighs heavily upon him. Further, Muth's eyes, as well as his creation's, take solace in shadows beneath the brow, in retreat or privacy.

Muth also has a cat as companionship in a solitary abode.

Has Muth projected himself so far into this character that Muth's world view is revealed through Moonshadow's adventures? If so, this could explain a great deal about both the Epic series and the **Dracula** graphic novel. In Moonshadow, a recurring theme is fatalistic predestination. One feels that this character, pure in spirit, will never really be happy, only content to strive, living a constant martyrdom as forces beyond his comprehension shape his life into increasingly twisted coils. One fictitious book repeatedly referred to in the series is **We Are All Ants In A Meaningless Cosmos** by Ragstone Phillit. This credo echoes throughout the series and it seems to let Moonshadow experience graphic atrocities to his spirit as an almost detached observer. That might be a good word to describe Muth's facial expression — detached — and intentionally. This is a young man who knows he is different in outlook and is very comfortable in being on a plane separate from what the rest of us inhabit, or so it appears.

One other image rings out from **Moonshadow** that might provide insight into Muth's character. In the series, the narrator is an elderly Moonshadow, commenting on the experiences of his youth, making the whole series a detailed flashback, with further flashbacks implanted within the old man's memoirs. That alone is not unusual since such flashbacks are an old storytelling device. What is significant is Muth's depiction of this balding, bearded, white-haired man who has grown wise through long and hard experiences. In book three, there is a panel of the old man in a prayerful pose as DeMatteis' script reads:

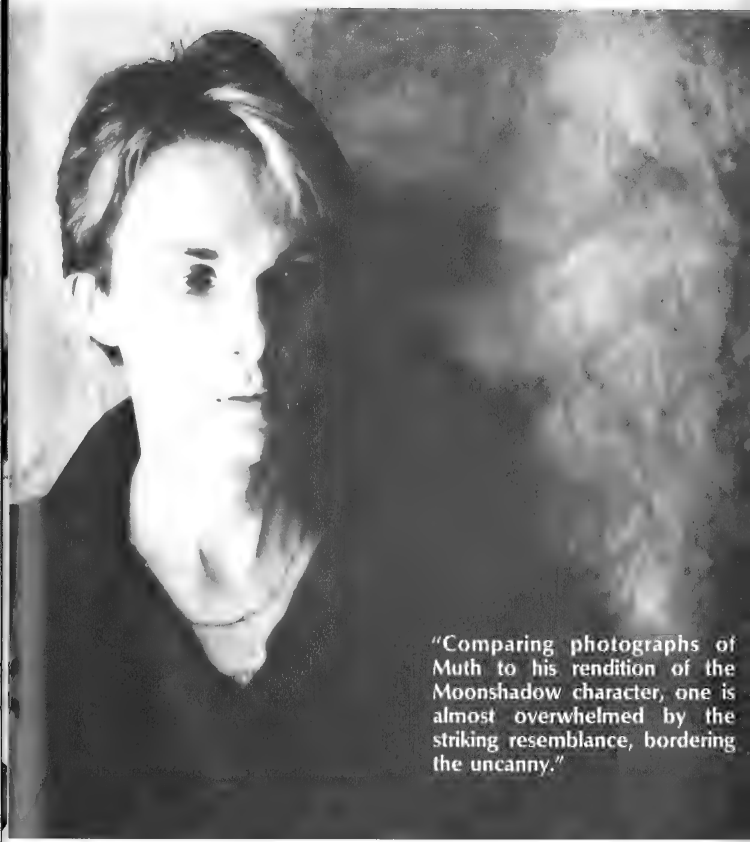
"More than that, Mother: You prayed for a God to HEAR your prayer. You never STOPPED praying, did you? Your whole LIFE was one long, urgent prayer!

"Sometimes I think the same can be said of MINE."

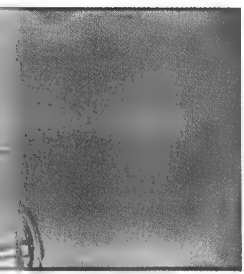
In this panel, the man's pose is reminiscent of a print known to a great many people. In the print, a man with a long white beard sits at a table in humble surroundings and says grace over a simple bowl of soup and a hard roll. How odd that such devoutness and humility can be recalled in the midst of such a harsh and sometimes unsettling story. Moonshadow wrestles with issues of right and wrong, morality and temptation, making this "fairy tale for grown-ups" strong stuff indeed. Such contradictions might denote something about the artist but definitely speak volumes about his art.

"His style changes and he uses various artistic ciphers, sometimes downbeat and other times vibrant," said Marvel Associate Editor Anne Nocenti. "...He can't be pigeonholed."

Muth's work, in fact, rebels against typing. This is why using **Moonshadow** as a bridge to understand Muth then allows these ideas about him to illuminate his new work in the **Dracula** graphic novel. In fact, Muth has been working on the **Dracula** graphic project before the **Moonshadow** series started. Over two years ago, Muth and DeMatteis approached Marvel with the **Dracula** proposal and the contracts were finalized before the first issue of **Moonshadow** reached the public. The team has been well-received by fans, eliciting praise even from science-fantasy legends such as Ray Bradbury who called **Moonshadow** "handsomely, beautifully done" and Kurt Vonnegut who termed it "perfectly beautiful" and reminiscient of William Blake.



"Comparing photographs of Muth to his rendition of the Moonshadow character, one is almost overwhelmed by the striking resemblance, bordering the uncanny."



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Muth's Dracula

What, then, can even an innovative new artist bring visually to a property so often redone as **Dracula**? In terms of the story itself, not much, as Muth said that he would stick with Bram Stoker's original storyline very closely. However, the way in which the characters and scenes will be depicted, should benefit Muth's water color technique.

The vampire tale might seem best suited for heavy oils, rich in texture, or pen-and-ink with its stark light on shadow look. However, advance looks at the paintings for the **Dracula** graphic novel make the light and airy washes of watercolor appear to be the perfect medium for telling this Gothic tale.

Muth's splash page for the book is two panels of a three-masted sailing ship plying its way through rough seas. The panels are separated and framed by Muth's stylized logo for **Dracula** and two ethereal vertical illustrations. It could have been a very pedestrian opening, a ship on the sea, but Muth exploits the possibilities of watercolor to soften the fog, put froth on the breaking waves and ripples in the canvas sails as they snap in a strong wind. The sea seems to roll, restlessly, constantly in motion. That Muth can evoke sensations that go beyond the visual is testimony to the power of his artwork. This splash page feels cold, the air smells of salt and the creaking of the wooden ship assaults the ears. Later in the work, one page of **Dracula** seems to bleed – not just a character but the page itself – and it almost feels warm and sticky to the touch.

This visual power allows Muth to reveal depth in not only Dracula himself but more so through the reaction of characters and readers to the Lord of the Vampires.

"Everyone I speak to about the character of Dracula sees him differently," Muth said "In this day and age, he could be anyone and we'd never have a clue."

Thus, Muth's artistic emphasis seems to be more upon the depiction of the victims and their reaction to Dracula. The vampire's victim is responsible for part of Dracula's victory and Muth perhaps uses this as a metaphor for the inherent weakness of human nature. He stated that, "In some respects, you have to invite Dracula in or he has no power over you. Some hidden part of the personality seems to want contact with the vampire."

The very nature of the vampire's bite betrays a crucial aspect of the enduring fascination with the vampire through literature. There is a lust/revulsion contradiction at work in the way victims of vampires are portrayed in films and novels. This dead creature now sustaining its blasphemous un-life by feeding on the living is repugnant but the hypnotic power

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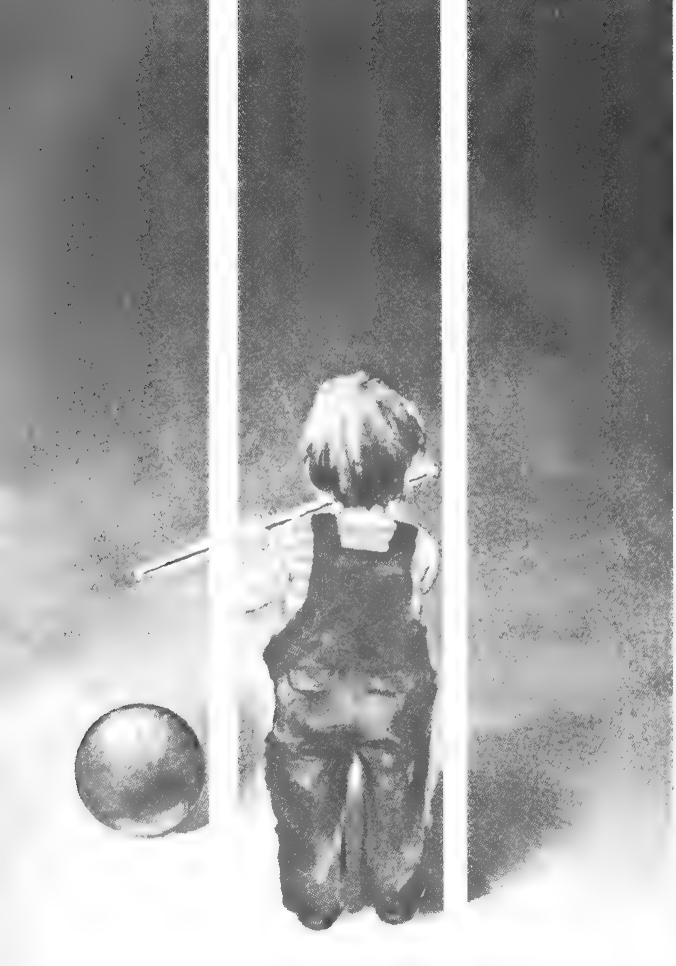

"Dracula is something I have thought about for quite some time. This is something that has been building up all my life."

and transformation into a flying creature (long one of mankind's most ardent fantasies) draw the victim to this kind of monster

As Ms. Nocenti summed up the rationale for doing yet one more version of **Dracula**, "The vision of Dracula cannot be too deeply explored. The theme is timeless and enduring and Dracula, himself, is open to countless individual interpretations."

Muth, then, might be the perfect artist to fully realize the contradictions in the vampire legend since his style can go from bright to dark and light to heavy with such ease. Still, some elements of the story will hold fast. "Dracula will be presented as an anti-super-Villain. I want him to represent the embodiment of evil," Muth said.

Even so, Muth returns over and over to the depiction of the victims, adding that, "**Dracula** is really about the dark side of human nature and that's more frightening than any imaginary demon."

In one depiction, this is clearly shown. It's a seduction scene, as the victim presents herself to Dracula. Her slender form, wraith-like in a white nightgown, is contrasted against the black-cloaked and towering figure of the vampire, reaching down to invite and embrace his victim. What is startling in Muth's composition, however, is that he lets the preceding panel totally obscure the upper half of Dracula himself. All the reader can see is the upturned face of the victim and a long, smooth throat. The focus is entirely on the woman and controlling his focus is one thing Muth does especially well.

Cinematic Artistry

This should be no surprise once the reader realizes that Muth is greatly influenced by cinematic artistry. He cites Peter Weir's haunting film **The Last Wave**, and the understated messages of Stanley Kubrick. "I see my work as one of images," Muth said of **Dracula** and, like a film director, he scouted locations prior to putting down the first scene. Muth journeyed to Vienna to soak up regional images and, while at a large cemetery, he noticed that, "For hundreds of yards in every direction there were headstones and the only other person I saw was an elderly woman."

Apparently, his field trip served him well since the **Dracula** graphic novel is full of well-paced "camera work." One page blends from a close-up of a leathery bat in flight against a velveteen night to a long shot from a ground-based viewpoint of a monolithic grey castle rising up through fog. The tiny figure of the bat can barely be discerned as it makes its approach. Both panels are framed by the same dead tree trunk and it gives the impression of movement to the bat's flight from one panel to the next.

Muth's work on **Moonshadow** seemed to indicate an affinity for predestination. Perhaps Muth was predestined to be the right artist to paint the Dracula legend. He seems to feel this and he said, "Dracula is something I have thought about for quite some time. This is something that has been building up all my life."

It will be difficult for readers to believe that a topic like **Dracula** can find new life, so to speak, when it has been done so many times and in so many media. In Muth's rendition, the point is not really what is being said but how it is being said. Muth's intent is to draw the reader into the story in much the same way that Dracula himself seduces his victims, not with raw violence but with style and grace.

"My goal is not to shock you in a simple, unclever way," Muth said, "but to send a chill up your spine."

Additional research and interviewing for this article was conducted by Alec Billyou

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Bailbondsman Jay Endicott's Secret Life As . . .

A MASKED MAN IN LOCUSTLAND

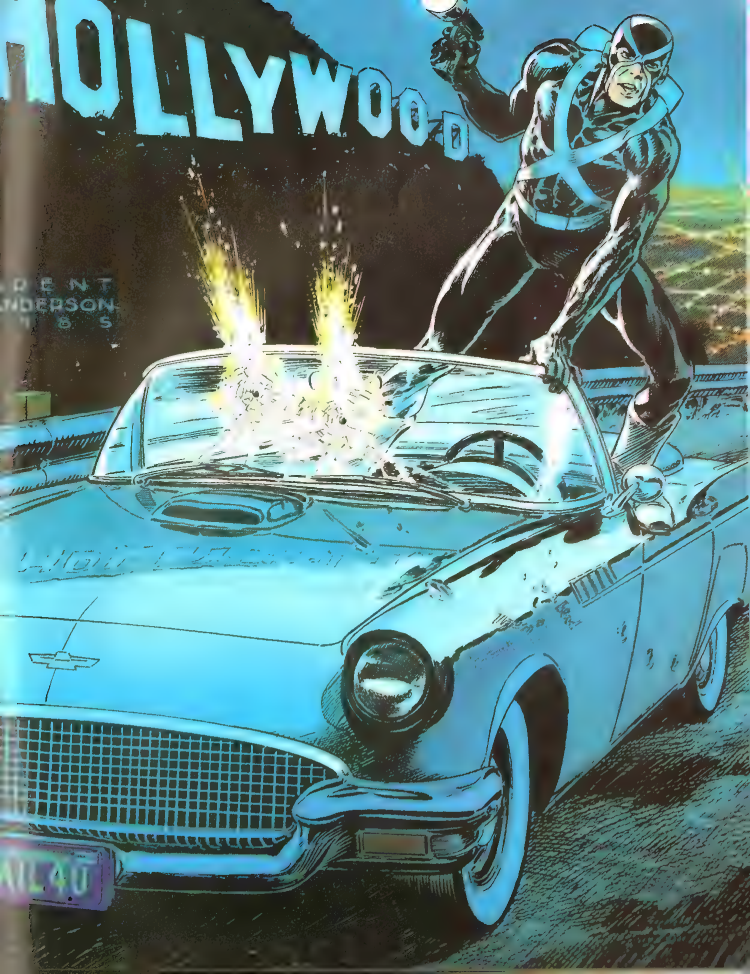
By Mark Ellis

"Hollywood started out a meaningless dream invented for money. But its colors ran, out through the holes in people's heads, spread across the landscape and solidified. (Now) we were stuck with a dream without meaning. It had become a nightmare that we lived in."

– Ross MacDonald

As a general rule, comic magazines follow trends, rather than create them. One only has to look at the immense number of toy and film-related comics on the stands to realize this.

One particular trend that has been slavishly followed during the past several years is the superficial psychoanalysis of super heroes. When the new generation of scripters entered the comic field, they self-consciously tailored "masked mystery men" stories to appeal to adolescent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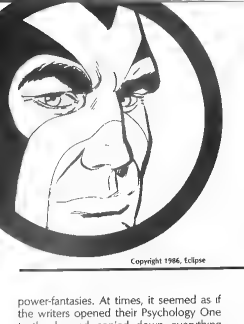

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Jay Endicott, bail bondsman with a golden heart, forces himself to live with the locusts. He has his golden heart sneered at, exploited and spat upon.

power-fantasies. At times, it seemed as if the writers opened their Psychology One textbooks and copied down everything that could possibly relate to a person with a dual identity. This did make masked heroes more appealing and, unfortunately, even more adolescent.

Psychologically justifying to a presumed adolescent reader the whys and wherefores of a super hero was innovative for a time, later it became a tedious shtick. A reader may require that his/her adolescent power fantasy be catered to, but it was rare when a masked mystery man recognized that he himself had an adolescent need to don a disguise to conceal his true, weak self.

Eclipse Comics' **Crossfire** series is one of the exceptions, a man who is fully aware of that egotistical need and puts on a mask in order to feed it, but managing to check this underlying streak of immaturity with a strong conscience. In fact, Crossfire is constantly struggling to turn a character flaw into a virtue. And though his own motivations are somewhat murky, that moral ambiguity fits right in with his environment.

Hollywoodian Entity

The **Crossfire** series presents the environs of Hollywood as a vital entity, as much of a star in its own right as Crossfire himself. Brought to garish life by writer Mark Evanier and premier penciller Dan Spiegle, Hollywood is far more than a set of clip-art buildings for Crossfire to swing across. It lives and breathes on its own, sheltering a great beauty which co-exists with a dark evil. **Crossfire's** point of view is uniquely Hollywood: Few of the stories in this series could be transplanted to the pages of another comic without losing a great deal of their peculiar ambiance.

That ambiance did not come about by accident. Both Mark Evanier and Dan Spiegle are seasoned professionals in the industry. Evanier has written for almost every major comic publisher in the country, but his primary experience comes from working in the film and TV business. Many of his **Crossfire** scripts are based on this background. He has the ability to write convoluted plots in the best Ross MacDonald manner, but he focuses on human foibles rather than a narrow perspective of evil.

Dan Spiegle was the artist on the long-running **Hopalong Cassidy** newspaper strip until he began working for Dell Comics in 1956. He produced almost all of their TV and movie-related magazines. His penciling style is sharp, clean and exceptionally atmospheric, which lends **Crossfire** a certain "Mean Streets" personality.

Evanier's and Spiegle's vision of Hollywood is drawn from the Raymond Chandler/Ross MacDonald school: The characters of **Crossfire** walk through a shabby, neon-lit wonderland full of psychic vampires, compromised principles and shattered dreams. Nothing is as it seems in this dark world and no one can easily trust another. Nathaniel West perceived Hollywood as attracting predatory locusts in human form, ready with voracious mandibles and insatiable appetites to consume anything of genuine value that might appear. To the locusts, everyone is a potential victim.

Bail Bondsman With Heart

Jay Endicott, bail bondsman with a golden heart, forces himself to live with the locusts. He has his golden heart sneered at, exploited and spat upon. Jay is the classic Baby-Boomer who strove for Yuppiedom but found he couldn't easily trade his conscience in for a jacuzzi. He's also the only super hero who more or less stumbled into adopting a masked identity, rather than vowing dramatically to assume one.

He stumbled into his role through his uncle. Edward Endicott operated a no-frills bail bonds business on Sunset Strip. He would often post bail for accused criminals when he knew beforehand that they had no collateral to put up. He was left holding the bag more than once when a client didn't appear in court, but more frequently he gained the gratitude and admiration of those unfortunates who were unable to buy justice.

When Jay Endicott dropped out of college in 1970, he went to work for his Uncle Ed as a skip-tracer, running down clients who had decided that discretion was the better part of valor as far as courts of law were concerned. Jay was a rather directionless young man, without any true ambition. He worked for his uncle under the comforting delusion that it was only a temporary port until his **real** ship came in.

While Jay was chasing after bail-jumpers, the black-clad Crossfire was chasing after secrets. A man named Jeff Baker was dressing himself in a mask and tights and hiring himself out as a freelance industrial spy. Baker was very good at his business. He was bothered by few scruples, and the laws determining individual privacy were of no consequence to him. No one played the game of private espionage better than Baker, **nee** Crossfire.

At one point, Jay Endicott found himself pursuing a bail-skipper named Dave Brogan in Las Vegas. At the same time, Crossfire was breaking into the penthouse of elderly and neurotic Howard Hughes. His contract called for him to find information which detailed a loan Hughes had made to one Richard M. Nixon. Terrified by this masked apparition, Hughes fled his penthouse into the streets, clad in only a sheet. Crossfire fled, too, with the information.

Meanwhile, Jay Endicott had been ejected from a casino for causing a disturbance while trying to apprehend Brogan. He saw the sheet-clad Hughes and totally unaware of the old man's identity, provided him with clothes and a hamburger.

Crossfire, Hughes and Jay went

their separate ways: Crossfire's information went into the files of Democratic Chairman Larry O'Brien. Hughes returned to his life of solitude, filled with his fear of germs and inestimable viewings of **Ice Station Zebra**. Jay went back to Hollywood without his man, but with a will ceding him all of Hughes' resources that the billionaire had secretly slipped into his briefcase (when Jay found the will later, he thought it part of a joke and threw it away). Everyone is familiar with what happened to Hughes' stolen file; it became a high water(gate) mark in American politics.

Shortly thereafter, Jay's uncle passed away, leaving the business to him. He considered selling the firm, but the words of Lou Mintz, counterfeiter and permanent client of Ed Endicott (and the man Jay suspected of forging the Hughes will) changed his mind. On the day of Nixon's resignation, Mintz called Jay, asking him to post his bail. He'd been arrested for printing $30 bills. When Jay informed him that he was sorry, the business was closed, Mintz replied, "I'm sorry, too! Sorry you are not like your uncle!"

The words stung, and Jay reluctantly put Endicott Bail Bonds back into business. Except he was not very good at it. He spent too much capital on clients without collateral and he was frequently left holding the bag. By degrees, Jay was crushed by the same forces that had crushed his uncle -- the hypocrisy of the legal system, the corruption in high and low places and the unshakable knowledge that no matter what he did to help people, it would never be enough.

A Masked Man

Then, one day, Jay posted the bond for a supposedly small-time criminal named Jeff Baker. When Baker disappeared (he was shot and killed while burglarizing an office), Jay went looking for him. In his apartment, he found the strobe-gun, high-tech precision burglar tools – along with the costume, glider-wings and mask of the infamous Crossfire.

A very frustrated Jay Endicott determined to adopt the persona of Crossfire. It was a quiet, very personal decision. Lightning did not flash across the sky, nor did Republicans flap through the window. Jay's feeling of helplessness had reached saturation point. He had to do **something** for his own sanity. So, he chose a path which, on the face of it, was insane. He became Crossfire, but with a slightly different M.O. To the world who used Crossfire's services, he would still be a for-hire private spy. However, he would use those criminal contacts to fight injustice. Or at least, that was the plan.

Jay's career as Crossfire was no more auspicious than his vocation as bail bondsman. Time and again, he squared off against, rebounded from and was nearly killed by criminals, assassins and psychos of every stripe. Not only did he manage to alienate the criminal element he was supposedly a part of, the authorities had arrest-on-sight orders on him. His love life was little better. His misfortune was to fall in love with Rainbow, the six-year-old leader of the DNAgents (hey, she looks 25!).

Also, he experienced a great deal of trouble figuring out just what he was supposed to do in his new identity. As Crossfire, Jay must support his reputation as a lawless spy by cooperating with criminals, but for most of the time he finds himself at odds with them. In the persona of a crime-fighter, he must fight crime, but he doesn't like to hurt people. As a super hero, he must be steadfast, upright and awesomely courageous, but he possesses a strong streak of common sense (a less charitable observer might describe this trait as cowardice).

As a bondsman, Jay lacks the necessary cynicism to be successful. As Crossfire, he into places that nobody else can. He breaks into buildings and steals information. He's not an international spy -- we haven't had him leave the country yet. The original Crossfire, according to legend, would break into CBS and steal the fall schedule and sell it to NBC.

With our guy, I had him break into the FBI one issue. I would say he is still a spy.

FOUR COLOR: Do you know any industrial spies?

EVANIER: I have talked with people who have done some of this. Not anywhere as elaborate, of course. There is a thriving market out there for information. When I was working on some TV shows we would be handed some documents that we were sworn to not reveal we ever had. They came from places they shouldn't have come from.

There are certainly people today who make their living purloining information with no regard for what damage they are doing or for what purpose. That's one thing I liked about the original Crossfire is his morality was, "You give me the money, I get you the information. No questions asked."

FOUR COLOR: Is there anything else you'd like to add?

EVANIER: Let me emphasize that one of the reasons I'm doing this comic is because the art is by Dan Spiegle. I think he is one of the best people in the business. He is highly responsible for whatever in the book works. I think he is just terrific.

Mark Evanier on Crossfire!

FOUR COLOR: Would you briefly discuss the **Crossfire** series?

Evanier: Crossfire is this warped little series I do that is halfway between detective and super hero and all set in Hollywood. It's about a man named Jay Endicott who is a bail bondsman by trade. He comes across the origin, costume, hardware, paraphernalia and moniker of the famous industrial spy named Crossfire. Endicott, a good guy, decides by taking over the life of the bad guy he can do a lot of damage to the criminal forces from within.

In the meantime, though, the police are still looking for Crossfire, not realizing he is a different person. Most of the stories spin off Hollywood themes – movies and television and are based tenuously on reality or my perceptions thereof.

FOUR COLOR: Do you consider Crossfire a spy?

Evanier: I think so. The original Crossfire was an industrial spy. One of his main points was that he was state of the art. The police are always five years behind the technology that I know about.

From that standpoint, he is a spy. He gets

The original Crossfire was an industrial spy. One of his main points was that he was state of the art. The police are always five years behind the technology that I know about.

doesn't have the single-minded, obsessive outrage to make a feared and respected crimefighter. Often, the primary reason for his dual identity seems simply to conceal Jay The Failure from the world for a while.

Motives And Setbacks

The question has never been fully answered: Why does Jay continue to complicate his life in such a manner? He's not a feverishly consumed Bruce Wayne, or a self-pittying whiner like Peter Parker. He tries to cope with the world the best he can and when he doesn't Jay refuses to retreat into morbid mental meanderings. Unlike the protagonists of the novels by MacDonald, Chandler and West, he does not indulge in brown studies or gray contemplations about the "meaning of it all." He merely sighs, patches up the latest wound, puts on his mask and goes out again into the Hollywood night.

Whatever his true motives may be, financial gain does not rank high among them. When he loses most of his high-tech tools, he has neither the money or inclination to replace them. After he is forced to destroy his costume and glider-wings, Jay doesn't concern himself with buying the materials to make a new one; he simply puts on a turtle-necked sweater, jeans, his mask, and goes on about his business.

Despite numerous contusions, abrasions and setbacks, Jay and Crossfire persevered, stalking the streets and backalleys of Hollywood, trying to prevent the tarnish of Tinseltown from dimming his personal vision of justice.

Jay found allies in his one-man crusade, as well as a host of enemies. The aforementioned Lou Mintz has helped and hindered him on numerous occasions. Captain Lou Gresham, a dedicated police officer, despises Crossfire as much as he admires Jay Endicott (or at least he did until **Crossfire and Rainbow #1**).

The Sentry Squad is a group of vigilante street kids patterned after the Guardian Angels. As devoted to justice as Jay, they are just as often disillusioned.

His closest ally is the telepathic Rainbow, a beautiful artificial woman who is a super heroine and in love with Jay. Seriously injured as Crossfire, Jay was rescued by Rainbow and restored to health by a transfusion of her unique flurocarbon blood. This act of mercy established a psychic link between the two. Rainbow needs to be near Jay, but not in the same bed. His frustration over this situation was hilariously delineated in "This Is Your Sex Life, Jay Endicott!" in **Crossfire and Rainbow #1**.

But Crossfire's adversaries outnumber his allies by a wide margin. He has faced the frighteningly well-armed assassin, The Ravager, gansters, thugs and more recently, the utterly psychotic iron-masked serial killer, The Witness.

Crossfire's most recurring nemesis is Peanuts Wurtzel, an aging hippie kingpin of a drug empire. A thoroughly California-type criminal, Wurtzel had been useful for information in the past, but after orchestrating the murder of one of Jay's clients, the uneasy alliance ended.

Low-lights In Tinseltown

Despite all of Crossfire's myriad adventures, the most effective stories are those that deal exclusively with the Hollywood mileau of faded decadence. Mark Evanier possesses the enviable ability to draw from his own experiences in film and TV and create wonderfully repulsive archetypes. If such a cast of characters appeared in a sitcom, they would be funny. In the context of **Crossfire**, they are shameful examples of humanity at its lowest.

For example, Sammy Flaveman "America's Favorite TV Host," is loathsome beyond verbal description. Laden with glittering rings, neck chains and inane attempts at sincerity, Flaveman is more than the epitomization of a stereotype. He is the epitomization of an epitomization. He is such a hypocritical manipulator, one can well imagine him mourning the passing of the Hollywood Ratpack era.

Joey Getz, a young, untalented and rampantly obnoxious would-be comic, worships Flaveman and would do anything for a stand-up shot on his program. Hoping to put Flaveman in his debt, Joey finds an underhanded way to get adultery charges against the TV host dismissed, and even provides him with drugs. He gets the opportunity to make America laugh, but unsurprisingly, his rising star is shot down and shortly thereafter, so is his body.

However, **Crossfire** does not always take such a prejudiced view of the people in Tinseltown. "The 24th Annual Death of Marilyn Monroe" and "The Norma Jean Conspiracy," respectively, treat the myths of Hollywood and its martyrs in a fashion which is sad, amusing, but decidely sinister.

This two-part tale is exceptional for a number of reasons. It represents Norma Jean **nee** Marilyn Monroe as a martyred icon, as much a symbol of worship 20-odd years after her death as she was when she was alive. The mystique which surrounds the sex symbol's life and demise is treated with both respect and a certain sympathetic cynicism toward those who view her tragic life as a romantic Hollywoodian fairy tale. Also, the issue of homosexuality is dealt with a rare, compassionate sensitivity. This is a pleasant surprise for a medium that presents "relevancy" with such a heavy hand that most such stories are rendered unreadable.

Crossfire #17 was the last issue featuring the character as a solo act. Jay reappeared in **Crossfire and Rainbow #1**, a four-part mini-series that deals mainly with the burgeoning love affair between exceptional people.

Rainbow is learning how to live as a human being and Jay is learning simply how to live. He has discarded the costume, strobe-gun and glider-wings, retaining only his mask and his adolescent need to perform good works in disguise. Though he has grown and matured since his initial appearance, he will never outgrow his passion for justice.

Crossfire's Future

Unfortunately, Jay's future beyond the conclusion of the mini-series is a bit uncertain. It would be a pity if an obviously sincere endeavor such as the **Crossfire** series should be boneyarded due to low sales. As they did with DC's **Blackhawk** revival, Evanier and Spiegle have taken what could have been a standard super hero premise and tried to stretch the parameters of the four color medium. **Blackhawk** was a war comic that scraped away the foolish romanticism associated with the Big One, and **Crossfire** was (is?) a super hero comic that eschewed messianism, glamour and civic consciousness in favor of a dogged, sometimes bumbling individualism. Jay Endicott is a heroic **schlimiel**, but without the trite angst of a Spider-Man imitation. He is the epitome of the post-'60s Everyman; harried, alienated from the bureaucracies he must deal with on a day-to-day basis, his major concern is trying to survive to the following day.

There are very few tales of costumed super-criminals within the pages of **Crossfire**, only stories of people, their hopes, their dreams, but more often, their nightmares. The character of Crossfire holds these many disparate elements together, but not through the virtue of super powers, endless fistfights or superior cunning.

Crossfire/Jay Endicott's primary power is that he quietly cares for others. The underlying theme of all of his adventures is a simple one: When the boundary between good and evil is hopelessly blurred, the only way to live is with good humor, compassion and a hand stretched out in friendship.

And those qualities have become damned rare commodities nowadays. Even in the four-color, never-never land of comic books.

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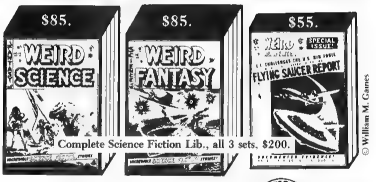

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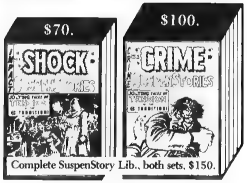

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in review

Welcome to "In Review," the review section of **Four Color Magazine.**. You may be asking yourself why a review section needs an introduction. Well, quite simply, our review section is intended to be a bit different from the norm and will, we hope, develop into a truly unique feature with your support and participation.

In each issue of **Four Color,** you can expect a variety of reviews in terms of both material and format. We plan to review not only individual issues but also entire series, sequences of issues within a title's run and recently-defunct series ("autopsies," so to speak) Titles reviewed will be chosen by our regular contributors from among those available at direct sales outlets. Publishers wishing to submit advance copies of titles should send them to the editor-in-chief of **Four Color.** Submitted issues will be randomly assigned to reviewers.

Formats will range from brief, "at-a-glance" reviews to longer, in-depth treatments to transcriptions of round robin sessions with several of our regular contributors. In all probability, no two issues will contain the same assortment of review formats, as each issue's contents will be determined by the items available on the market.

Our final feature will hopefully be our most interesting. As soon as you begin to contribute them, **your** opinions of titles reviewed and matters addressed in this section- essentially, **your** options of **our** options--will fill our final page each issue. This page will be devoted to an open dialoge amongst our contributors, our readers and even industry professionals; come one, come all **Four Color's** "In Review" will, we hope, become **the** common ground where all those who make up the world of comics can come together to discuss their views of the industry and its products.

Why a dialogue page? Because we fully realize that any review is neither more nor less than the opinion of an individual reviewer. We consider anyone's opinion, in general, to be just as valid. Therefore, we wholeheartedly invite you to engage our reviewers (and your fellow readers) in dialogue each month. Our sole ground-rule is that you present your views in a constructive manner. Comments intended for our dialogue page should be specifically addressed to "In Review," to avoid confusion with general letters to the editor.

Again, welcome. We're happy to have you with us.

Haunted by Old Plots

As a long-time fan of the good cap tain, it genuinely pains me to say that this book needs help--fast.

The state of affairs is hard to under stand. Mark Gruenwald has proven himself to be a competent and often imaginative writer, as evidenced by his work on the **Squadron Supreme** maxi-series and his late-seventies collaborations with Ralph Macchio. Paul Neary's pencils are generally clear and clean and reflect effective storytelling. And, last but not least, the star of the book is one of the most legendary, recognizable and inspiring of all comic book heroes.

How, then, is the inspiration eluding the creative team?

The latest issue features a fairly tired old warhouse of a plot Cap is haunted by old and/or deceased friends and foes, in reality only illusions produced by Dr Faustus. At the same time, our hero becomes a strong contender for the "understatement of the year" award for the second caption in the last panel on page 23. Jim Shooter, too, must have been pleased to see his nineteen-year-old "Ghost of Ferro Lad" plot recycled in erzatz form, as the "ironic twist" (shades of Mort Weisinger) to this story

What this book seems to be lacking is originality. Let's take a look at recent developments: Cap traveling the roads of America, that worked for neither **Green Lantern** under the guidance of Denny O'Neil nor Cap himself in the hands of Stan Lee in 1970; Cap working with a national network of supporters, reminiscent of the Teen Brigade in early issues of **Hulk** and **Avengers;** Cap wrestling with feelings of guilt, in which category he's been second only to Peter Parker over the years, over his killings of a terrorist, (I must, however, admit that this last part is, at least, a nice counterpoint to the Ramboesque-violence pervading today's popular culture). And, for the umpteenth time in his publishing history, Cap has **no** supporting cast to speak of on any regular basis.

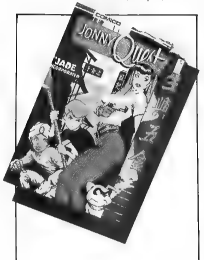
To his credit, Gruenwald is remarkably good at describing and showcasing Cap's fighting style and abilities. Pages 11-15 form a tour-de-force of crisp and generally concise

narration and exposition.

In general, though, **Captain America** (the series) and Captain America (the character) are both in need of a strong, clear and original direction. Cap has always been, admittedly, a difficult character to get a hold on outside of either a) World War II or b) **The Avengers.** But it **has** been done. Both Steve Englehart and Roger Stern were able to breathe new life into **Captain America** during their tenures on the book, presenting generally original stories (though Englehart **also** used a "haunting-by-Faustus" retread) and examining new facets of the title character.

To Mark and Paul: There is little doubt that you **can** do a good job on Cap. But it will require a good bit more insight and creativity than you've shown so far

Joseph J. Cicala



Sim Sim Salla Bim

When I was a kid, I remember watching **Jonny Quest** when it first came on TV. Prime-time cartoons what a great idea! Even today, I can still remember scenes of sinister frogmen from the Sargasso Sea wielding their deadly laser rays, invisible energy creatures being lured out of hiding by a string of electric light bulbs, and a giant sphere suddenly sprouting legs and stalking away like a titanic alien spider. Pretty good for a 20-year-old series!

I'm happy to report that Comico's revival of **Jonny Quest** is a pretty nifty evocation of the original series and a pretty good read in its own right. The characters that I knew so well from the cathode-ray tube are all here, looking none the worse for wear from being on ice since the 1960s and transplanted to the printed page. There's Jonny, himself, of course, that pluckiest of plucky 12-year-olds, who almost always found himself getting into adventures that real kids only dreamed of having; Dr. Benton Quest, his scientist dad, Haji, the young mystic of the east ("Sim, sim, salla bim!"); Race Bannon, tutor and ex-soldier of fortune, and Bandit, the redoubtable dog.

It just hit me while writing this review that Bandit might have been one of Dr. Quest's experiments having to do with the increasing of animal intelligence. . . that didn't quite pan out. Bandit, even though he was able to save the day for our cast of characters many times, could be incredibly dense and usually at the most inappropriate moments. Perhaps on Earth Hanna-Barbara, Dr. Quest's experiments continued, culminating in the creation of Scrappy-Doo. Truly, a frightening thought, and one that really doesn't belong in this review.

Writer William Messner-Loebs (probably best known for **Journey** and his work on **Mr. Monster**) manages with the help of a rotating roster of top comic talents, to keep the series in that eternal quasi-present (Is it now? Ten years from now? Twenty years ago?) that was in evidence in the TV series. Oh, every now-and then an actual date slips in (as in the opening of #3's "Guns for the Laughting Man"), but by-and-large, these can be ignored.

As well they should. Kids and adventure is a timeless concept that stretches back past Tom Swift and Tom Sawyer to David and Goliath (and probably before that). Stores so far have run the gamut from intrigue (the aforementioned issue #3, with the nifty stylizations of Marc Helpel and Mark Wheatley, and #5's "Jade, Incorporated"), to straight adventure (#1's "Sands of Khasa Tahid" drawn by the series' creator, Doug Wildey, and "City of Time Lost," art by the team of Steve Rude and Mike Royer , to comedy-adventure ("Marley Frost is Here to Stay" from #4, with a finely detailed pencil-and-ink job by Tom Yeates, Dan Adkins and friends) to out-and-out tear-jerker ("Enter Race Bannon," the story of the last days of Jonny's mom, with appropriately emotional artwork by Wendy Pini and Joe Staton). Not a bad range for the first five issues

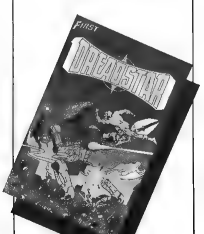
Reader response to the series has been good: Originally announced as a twelve issue limited series, **Jonny Quest** has been promoted to full series status. The one drawback to this is that the rotating artist idea will probably be dropped. Too bad. I enjoyed seeing the various interpretations of the Quest family, every one different, and yet each capturing some aspect of that decades-old cartoon classic. The current issue's (35) art team of Mitch Schauer and John Nyberg may not be as spectacular as, say, the Yeates and company job, or the Doug Wildey issue, but it tells the story clearly, concisely and to the point. And what the hey, it has a Dave Stevens cover, complete with one of Dave's improbably designed women in a Jezebel Jade outfit. Let's hope that the permanent team can rise to the challenge of turning out incredible Artwork on a monthly basis.

In the meantime, Messner-Loebs' scripts continue to combine action, adventure, human-interest and humor into a comic that I'd recommend to anyone as a relief from ninja-critters and teenage-mutant teams.

Y'know, sometimes I wish **my** dad had been a world-famous scientist.

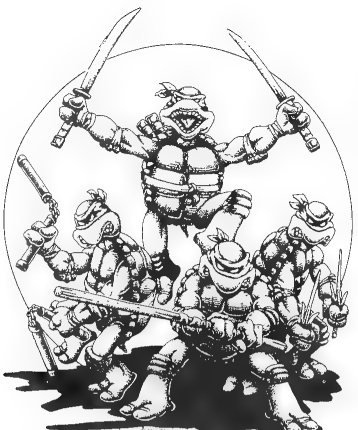
–Jeff Kapalka

Recommended



1. Nexus #29
2. Batman #404
3. Watchmen #6
4. Dreadstar #28

–Paul Haber



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DC RENAISSANCE

(Con't from page 25)

Mike Baron the writer. It is sort of a trial spin for the two of them working together. It is really a nice story.

FOUR COLOR: We are very interested in the new **Wonder Woman**. How are you going to differentiate it from the previous version and how will this attract an audience?

GIORDANO: I really don't think there is any way to attract a readership to it outside of George Perez. That is one of the reasons I feel George's contribution to the title is immense. To keep the reader, after you attract him, depends on execution and the concept. As we're doing on so many of the so-called revitalization titles, we go back to the roots to search out what made the concepts work in the first place

If you examine John Byrne's **Superman** very closely, you'll see it bears a striking resemblance to Seigel and Shuster's. That there was nothing that wasn't done in Seigel and Shuster's version, it has just been updated for the '80s.

The original version didn't have Ma and Pa Kent dying. If you go back you'll see that we do things that work

Essentially, what we are doing with Wonder Woman that makes her different from the previous version is only that we are going to make her steep more deeply in the mythos of Paradise Island and the Amazon. She will come to man's world and do the things she's done there but she's an Amazon, first, last and always. She knows it and everyone else does. Her background, the culture difference, will become part of the storyline.

In recent years, Wonder Woman has not made any references, with the exception of an occasional "Great Hera," to her roots. We are defining that much more closely. The first issue, in fact, is very heavily steeped in ancient mythology. The creation of the Amazon race and Wonder Woman's creations is slightly different but based more on Greek mythology than has ever been done before.

It will be more of a feminist magazine than it had been in the past, but not in an offensive way. Again, in the early version, Marston [Dr. William Moulton Marston was the original writer] was a feminist. The only Wonder Woman that was ever successful was the first version, the one Marston created. When he stopped doing the strip it went away.

It has been around all these years and we are going to publish it no matter what. What we've done is gone back to those roots and try to make some sense out of them for the '80s. I think we've been successful.

FOUR COLOR: How about the storyline for the first couple of issues. Will it totally surround her on Paradise Island?

GIORDANO: The first issue is totally Paradise Island. As a matter of fact, Wonder Woman doesn't appear in costume until the very last page. That's completely foundation. There is a good storyline involving the souls of the Amazons coming from women from the beginning of time. These women had problems as a result of their contact with men. When the story opens a cave woman is unceremoniously murdered by a cave man who feels she has not done her duty. That spirit becomes the spirit of Wonder Woman's mother.

It is a little hard to envision this working until you see how George [Perez] has made it work.

FOUR COLOR: Referring to the character of Wonder Woman herself, will there be any radical changes? It seems to us that she is the same Wonder Woman as in the previous version?

GIORDANO: Yes and no. It is the same but in execution it's given a lot more input. There will be changes in the storyline, too. It will be set, I believe, in Boston. There will be considerable changes in her operational attitudes in man's world. She won't be part of the War Department. She won't be a secretary working there. She'll be more involved with people on the street kind of situations. Her powers have changed somewhat. There'll be no robot plane.

Her being aware of and utilizing her background as part of her character and personality will have considerable bearing on the storyline.

The previous Wonder Woman claimed she came here to help man make peace. She proceeded to wack everybody around regularly. She just acted as every other super hero did, not in the spirit of peace and love but just kick-ass, mostly. She showed no more or less restraint than Batman did in dealing with the criminal element. That will not necessarily be true today.

FOUR COLOR: What version of Batman do you accept as definitive or is it DC policy to allow differing interpretations?

GIORDANO: I prefer Denny O'Neil's ver-

sion, that's why he's editing the book. Denny is in charge of all of the books that have Batman in them. He's very much in charge of prohibiting or limiting the character elsewhere to the version he's producing. It has created problems for him and is a job and a half. So far he's doing it.

He has to coordinate two very strong-willed writers, right from the beginning on **Batman** and **Detective** because we're starting with Frank Miller writing one and Mike Barr the other. **Batman** will then go to Max Collins to write. There'll be other writers along the way and all of them will have to write Denny's version. It is creating some personality problems, some personality rifts between the group.

FOUR COLOR: Including Steve Englehart?

GIORDANO: Steve is not part of the group any longer. Steve felt he needed to pass on the situation I just described. When we first started to talk to Steve about it Denny was not in the picture. Evidentally what we had was two different people and only one was in charge. Steve felt, when we brought Denny in, that he didn't feel comfortable being part of the group or writing somebody else's version of the character. I don't blame him for it.

FOUR COLOR. Would you clarify which version the O'Neil Batman will be? The longer/vigilante?

GIORDANO: He's not going to be the guy who opens up supermarkets and smiles nice for the kids! That version is gone! He'll essentially be the loner. Coming off of Frank Miller's version [Miller will be doing the mini-series "Batman Year One" within the regular title] he'll be a vigilante, his justice. I don't think it will be mean-spirited. I've got to make that distinction. The **Dark Knight** version was not code-approved. By virtue of its cost and production values it was for a considerably older reader than we expect to be attracting with the newer version. After Miller's and Nazzuchelli's four issue series that will be approved by the code, Mike Barr will do year two.

FOUR COLOR: After years one and two, where do you intend to take the series?

GIORDANO: Year three.

FOUR COLOR: Seriously?

GIORDANO: Seriously. We're not going to call it Year Three but the titles that follow Year One and Year Two will essentially be from the third year forward. We are just taking it in chronological order. It may even lead to number one for Batman. We're working on that now. We haven't come to a conclusion. It will depend on whether the material is distinctly different enough by execution. Again, I place a greater value on execution than perhaps you do. The execution of the material is what makes it different from previous years.

If you come down to the basics of the character, there is very little difference between Frank Miller's **Dark Knight** and the Batman that was done in the regular comic books a couple of years back. He added a little harder edge to the character but the difference is in execution. How much of the violence was real in **Dark Knight** is what makes the difference if you come right down to it. How much Batman felt he had to take the law into his own hands, which was controlled by the fact that the lawless element had gotten out of hand. If we caused such a great imbalance in the scales of justice and lawlessness, perhaps more stringent methods are needed to bring the balance back. That's execution, but it will essentially be the same character.

FOUR COLOR: Assuming **Batman** does start again with #1, all your flagship titles will have in effect restarted. Why are you restarting with first issues? Is it due to market demands?

GIORDANO: No, not really. The market isn't demanding it of us that we do #1s. We're trying to call attention to the fact that what we're doing is different. It is new. I guess that maybe is a market demand in a way. It is a market requirement from our standpoint.

The market has a built-in resistance to changing its mind about the way it orders, unless you give it a reason to. You can get somebody to buy an extraordinarily large amount of issues of a particular issue of a book. Let's say the **Teen Titans**, with Eduardo Barreto working on it, are at one level. If you bring George Perez back for one issue you'll get a blip up and then go back down again. It's nothing that will hold.

Number one [issues] make a statement from the company. We have not in the past, nor do we intend to continue in the future, use #1 as a way to get more people to buy a book. We're using #1 as a way of saying, "This is the beginning of a new line of stories on this character."

Obviously it would be to our advantage to say #1 on **Batman** and make it definite. What I'm saying to you is that we want to see the stories first to make sure we're different enough to say this is a new line of

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stories and then we'll say that's a #1.

We feel we have a responsibility not to put our hands in our readers' pockets if we can avoid it.

FOUR COLOR: What does DC plan to do to follow up **The Dark Knight** creative-wise? In other words, what will be the next comic headlines in **Rolling Stone**?

GIORDANO: That's hard to say. Something like **Rolling Stone** happens once in a while. A particular set of elements came together at the same moment and we had a **Rolling Stone** interview.

I can tell you what we're going to do in the format next. Whether it will generate that much publicity or not I have no way of knowing. Mike Grell is now working on a three issue series, in that format, on **Green Arrow**. It will attempt to do pretty much the same things **Dark Knight** did in terms of attracting an older audience and so forth. Whether anyone will notice or care, I have no way of knowing.

My presumption would be that Batman, Superman and Wonder Woman get some kind of media interest and everything else won't.

Frank Miller is doing a one issue follow-up to **Dark Knight**. He'll finish up some storyline ideas that he never had a chance to put in.

We have one or two other projects that are too much pie-in-the-sky right now for us to talk about them. When I've got signed contracts or people working on the projects I'll talk about them.

FOUR COLOR: How about a gut feeling as to what will be your next creative height after **Dark Knight** and **Watchmen**?

GIORDANO: I don't have a gut feeling. If I did I would give it to you. I don't even have an instinctive feeling. I'm kind of a realist. When I see it in front of me I recognize what I have. I knew what I had when the first 10 pages of **Dark Knight** came in. I knew what I had when the first half book of **Watchmen** came in. Until then it is kind of hard to tell.

You read an idea that is really wonderful. For example, I can say creatively, the best book we're going to do for this year is a Dr. Fate mini-series that Mark DeMatteis is writing. He has done a wonderful job on the writing. So wonderful, I don't know if it can be drawn. I can't really think of an artist good enough to do it justice. If we get an artist good enough to do it justice, that will be the best one for the year. I'm not willing to bet on that now.

FOUR COLOR: Unlike your other flagship titles, **Green Latern's** changes were slower, smoother, more low key and hardly noticable. Why? Was this due to Steve Englehart?

GIORDANO: You can't ever really point at one person. The combination of Steve Englehart and Andy Helfer played a major role. I like to believe that Steve is doing better work for us than he is doing for Marvel. I believe this is because of the kind of relationship he has with the people here. He and Andy work very well together. They bounce ideas off each other. Steve unquestionably does all of the writing, but I think the feedback he gets inspires him a little more.

He is making less money doing **Green Latern Corps** than anything he does at Marvel. We don't have the same sales and the same royalty payment. From what he's told me he is getting a good deal of enjoyment out of it and I think his best work.

FOUR COLOR: Will the new **Justice League** again serve as a platform for showcasing DC's flagship titles?

GIORDANO: As a matter of fact, not only the flagship titles–for sure them–but also others from time to time. There'll be a core group but even within the group characters will float in and out of the series. For example, Captain Marvel will be

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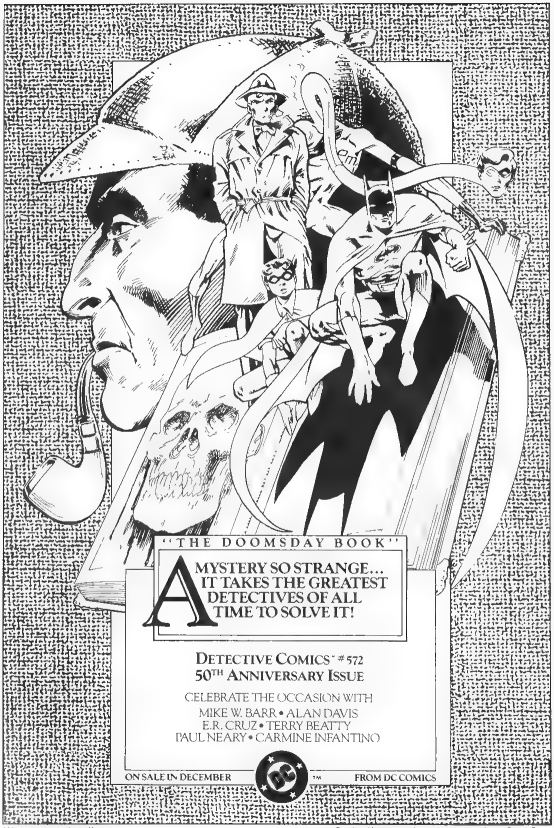
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Sherlock Holmes is a character created by Arthur Conan Doyle

in the first six issues and then he'll go away. The group will take on a decided international look. As a matter of fact, there has been some talk about calling it "Justice League International" to replace the "of America."

To give you an idea where we're going there: A different rationale and a really different artist. Kevin Maguire is doing the art on it. He just walked in off the street. You don't know who he is and you won't know who he is until you see the book. He's really quite good.

FOUR COLOR: How will the **Justice League** and its characters be improved?

GIORDANO: Well, actually, 99% of the characters will be improved elsewhere and just be there. Captain Marvel is appearing in a mini-series before **Justice League** comes out. A lot of the characters are coming in off **Legends**. A lot of characters are coming in off mini-series that redevelop or reposition them. The revitalizations are not that drastic. Taken in its totality, we have a considerably different universe than we had before in terms of the characters. Again, you'll see through execution the kind of effect it has on the Justice League.

If you were to ask me in a few chosen words to explain what **Justice League** is, it's exactly the same as **Justice League of America**, except it is so different.

FOUR COLOR: How about the line-up?

GIORDANO: Blue Beetle, Mr. Miracle, Booster Gold, Captain Marvel, Green Lantern's Guy Gardner, Dr. Fate, Black Canary, Batman and the Martian Manhunter. It should be obvious that we won't see Superman or Wonder Woman in the first few issues because it will conflict with their development issues. They'll probably come in issue #7 or something like that. Parts of this group disappear by issue #6.

FOUR COLOR (holding up the first issue cover): So this is Kevin Maguire, he's very impressive.

GIORDANO: To give you an idea how much he's impressed people, Terry Austin came into [editor] Andy Helfer's room, sat down, looked over at the desk and said, "What's that?" Andy said, that's the new **Justice League**. He said, "Who's the penciler?" he said, Kevin Maguire. Terry said, "I'll ink that!" Now, Terry doesn't line up for too many projects but that was one that obviously appealed to him.

The pencils are very appealing. I've inked his first professional job, a Deadman origin for **Secret Origins**. It will come out after the first **Justice League** but in terms of what he did it was his first professional job.

He is really good with faces. When you're talking about characterization, the artist has to know how to draw faces or it all goes away. If you take a look at those faces [on the cover of **Justice League #1**], you'll see what I'm talking about. They look like different people. He manages to get a distinctly different look to each character and he knows how to animate their mouths, heads, hands and things to make them look real.

FOUR COLOR: What new titles will DC be launching in the months ahead?

GIORDANO: I'm up to December...'87! I don't want to give you that far ahead because there is always a possibility some of those fall off a table. I don't want to do another **Redeemer**, where we announce something is coming out and it ends up we can't get it out so we destroy the book.

Starting from January there is **Shazam**, a four issue mini-series by Roy Thomas and Tom Mandrake bringing the one and only Captain Marvel back to life. Essentially, it's a revitalization. We're recreating Captain Marvel, too. Again, in a minor way. We're starting with the origin in recreating the characters and recreating Savannah. It is not going to be C.C. Beck's version or tongue-in-cheek. It is going to be a serious, black, moody super hero-type book. I'm talking about as serious as any other.

Suicide Squad is a revival and update of the Squad we've had in our books from time to time. John Ostrander is writing it. Luke McDonnell and Carl Kesel are the artists.

The Spectre, that is a real good version of it by Doug Moench and Gene Colan.

FOUR COLOR: We hear it's a horror series?

GIORDANO: Yes. It is a horror/super hero rather than super hero/horror. It is our attempt to mix the two genres. Horror seems to be doing fairly well and super heroes always does well. We've made this a little closer to a horror series than we've done in the past with Spectre.

It's not really the new Spectre, it's the same old Spectre. We've just given him a new assignment in the world as a result of failures on his part in halting **Crisis**. The deity that controls him said as a penance he has to do something new. I'm not going to go into the specifics. Corrigan [Spectre's alter ego] will be a private detective in this version rather than a police man. To give you an idea how it works his office is above Madam Xanadu's shop in Greenwich Village. We are definitely tying the mystic and the occult into the super hero aspects of The Spectre.

Young All Stars, that is a newer version of the current **All Star Squadron**. It includes a core group of five super heroes, four of

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whom we haven't seen before and the other an updated version of The Fury. That will be written by Thomas and drawn by Ernie Colon.

Dr. Fate, that I told you about earlier, written by Mark DeMatteis. Currently, Keith Giffen is giving a shot to the art. I'm not really positive how that will work out.

The Shadow. That might be an interesting one. Andy Helfer is writing it and Bill Sienkiewicz is going to draw it. We're picking up where Chaykin left off pretty much. Chaykin has given the project his blessing and will be doing some covers for it. That will be ongoing.

I think from that point on we get a little bit nebulous. Some of these things aren't far enough in the works for me to make too many comments. This takes us up to May of '87.

The only other thing I'd like to point out because I think it's fairly solid is in June of '87 there'll be a title appearing called **Silver Blade**. I consider that to be something to watch because **Silver Blade** is new and we're revitalizng the writer in a way. Carey Bates, who has been related to **Superman** for so long has created something that will dispel any possible ideas that some fans may have had as to his ability to write comic books. He was writing the **Superman** he was expected to write for that period of time. He recognized that he now had to get out, that he is not doing **Superman** any more, and has to attract readers all over again. All of us in the field, incidentally, know how great Carey is. I'm afraid he has been under-appreciated by most of the fans and I think **Silver Blade** will go a long way to dispelling that.

Gene Colan also is doing that.

I'll read you the promotional copy we have here by way of explaining it: Longtime **Superman** writer Carey Bates launches his first private creation featuring an aging movie star made young again by the very magic that enabled him to become one of the heroes he portrayed on the screen.

It's a 12 issue maxi-series.

FOUR COLOR: Are there any plans for a new Doom Patrol?

GIORDANO: Yes. Doom Patrol is planned for a July release. Steve Lightle is working on the art. I don't want to make too much out of that at this point. Although the first issue is in, and July sounds like a long way off to you, it doesn't sound like a long way off to me.

FOUR COLOR: Alan Moore has stated he plans to leave **Swamp Thing** soon. Do you plan to continue the title?

GIORDANO: At this point, yes. I don't have too many specifics. We will probably, somewhere before the end of Moore's run, change it to a direct-only title. We'll take it off of the newsstands entirely. Most of our sales have been coming from the shops, anyway.

FOUR COLOR: Will the series continue its romance tones or will it be changed back into a horror?

GIORDANO: I really have no idea what tack will be taken after Alan leaves the book. He's scheduled to stay on it until #67 or #68. The number has been fluctuating based on the possibility of introducing a few fill-ins to try to take the strain off of Alan. If we do one fill-in, it will be #66, if we do two it will be #67.

There will be a spin-off from that, incidentally. We're spinning off Constantine into his own title. Two British people are going to be doing it, Jamie Delano is writing it–a wonderful concept, it really is. The artist is John Ridgeway.

We've taken a very strong interest in the British creative people. We've recently sent a whole slew of creative people over there. Karen Burger has recently been made coordinator between us and the group there. I'll be going to London in the early part of '87 to address their cartoonist society. I'll also be having a workshop for the people who are working with us to get a feel of how our projects are moving along. I'll also be seeing if we can't interest some people in other projects.

The major reason we're doing this is because Alan Moore is not an exception. The fact of the matter is that the cartoonists who work there and the writers are working for a more mature audience and they've had considerable success at it. Witness, Alan Moore. We are very enthusiastic at the relationship we've developed with a handful of these people.

FOUR COLOR: Who is being groomed to replace Moore on the **Swamp Thing**?

GIORDANO: I don't want to mention names because we are negotiating with several people at this point. At least one will be an American artist/writer and at least one will be a British team. I would hesitate to even speculate as to where it will end up. There is always a possibility it will end up on the cutting-room floor. We try not to think about that right now.

FOUR COLOR: How has response been to **Watchmen**?

GIORDANO: The response to **Watchmen** has been overwhelming. At a time when $1.50 comic books are hard to give away we're selling a great many of them. That's one of the best sellers in a line at twice the cover-price of a 75 cents comic book. It is doing fantastically well from a sales viewpoint. From a critical viewpoint I've never heard a bad word and I don't think you have either.

The characters in **Watchmen** are all the Charlton characters. Alan called me one day and said, "I've got an idea on how we can use your Charlton characters." I said send it along, I'd love to see it. He sent along the idea that is now **Watchmen**, but it was populated by all of the Charlton characters. Rorschach was The Question, for example. You can find the parallels if you go into the characters and look at them

I said, this is a great idea but you aren't going to do this to the Charlton characters because they'll be ruined forever! He laughed and said, "Yeah, you don't want to throw out the baby with the bath water!" I said, "that's right!"

So I said, "Alan, I love this story so much I'm not willing to give up on it. Create a new bunch of characters. You can use whatever of the Charlton characters you feel is essential." Therefore, he used the no-features face-mask with changing patterns for Rorschach.

FOUR COLOR: Do you feel criticism in

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the fan press of the rape scene was justified?

GIORDANO: Well, if you don't like it, it is justified. In the context of the story I don't see anything wrong with it. I think our major problem, and this is one we're addressing in a major way, is labeling products of that kind. I think the major problem, for example, with **Angle Love** which is not a big seller but has drawn some criticism, is the lack of a label. I think we should have been a little more forthright in labeling what **Watchmen** is.

Watchmen definitely is for adults only. We didn't say it clearly enough and we should have said it on the cover.

Aside from that I don't apologize for anything that has appeared in it. In the context of the story they were needed, tastefully done, necessary.

FOUR COLOR: Has Moore committed to future projects after **Swamp Thing** and **Watchmen**?

GIORDANO: Moore has committed to quite a few projects. He is one of those people who keep a lot of irons on the fire. We are going to do a reprint of the **V For Vendetta** material he did with David Lloyd in England, but with the conclusion. The conclusion has never been published. It will be roughly one-third of the material. At this point, it looks like all of the material together will be around 300 pages, in my mind a maxi-series. Although, we can make an argument for making it a six issue series at 48 pages each.

He has also submitted ideas for a cross-over, like **Crisis** if you will but not like **Crisis**. That kind of major storyline that makes major changes in the DC universe and incorporates usage of all of the books. It would be for 1988 if it happens at all.

Without going too deeply into it, I'd like to point out that the first version of this cross-over series was in essence rejected because it was so sexual. He sent me one in a totally different direction, the storyline had to do with relationships between people. I would have loved to have done it but it was just something that we couldn't have gotten away with in the environment we find ourselves in today. There seems to be a strange, loud noise out there having to do with sexual content. They don't care about violence but the people who are picking on comics these days are only looking at sexual content.

FOUR COLOR: How much effect has Alan Moore had on DC's writers?

GIORDANO: I wouldn't even restrict that to DC writers. Alan Moore has had a vast effect on every writer in this business. He has become the standard. Just as Neil Adams was the standard for artists 10, 15 years ago and everybody aspired to be the next Neil Adams, Alan Moore has certainly done that. He's the only writer in my recollection that has been able to obtain that kind of status. He's not only a hero to the people that read the stuff, he is a hero to the people who write the stuff. Everyone compares themselves to Alan now. They don't compare themselves to what they did last year or two years ago.

FOUR COLOR: Obviously '**Mazing Man** was a well-crafted, nice package. Why didn't it catch on?

GIORDANO: The simple answer to that question I guess is that we didn't have a marketing plan. I'm not blaming anybody either here or anywhere else. When you have a marketplace that has illustrated clearly that it is so in favor of heroic fantasy and so dead-set against buying anything else in large numbers, it behooves a publisher who is contemplating entry to create a marketing plan at the same time the product is created. The marketing plan being, who is interested in this, what audience am I aiming this for and how can I reach them? If the answer is there ain't no way to reach them, you shouldn't publish it.

However, in the case of '**Mazing Man** we all liked it so much we wanted to publish it. That was a labor of love, on the part of the creative people and on the part of the company. We endorsed and supported the project knowing from day one that we weren't going to make money on it. We never expected it to get beyond 12 issues but we endorsed it because we liked it. We thought it deserved to get aired. We hoped somebody would find it in time and, the last issue, sales went considerably up. This was in part due to it being the last issue and also the hokey connection to **Dark Knight** that Frank [Miller] did because he was supporting the book. Frank wanted to do the cover for that book.

Everyone in the business enjoyed '**Mazing Man** but not enough people bought it.

FOUR COLOR: What effect has this had, or will this have on any future bold experiments?

GIORDANO: Oh, we're not discouraged by that. There is a '**Mazing Man Special** coming out sometime this year. It's a 48-pager and the original team goes back to the drawing board. We'll probably try something on 'Mazing Man on a regular basis and we'll continue to experiment. Experimenting is part of what we do here. It is a company policy, not contingent on making money. We make money on **Man of Steel** and **Dark Knight**, we don't have to make money on everything. An alien thought at Marvel, incidentally. As a total aside, they are so afraid of failure they won't consider putting out anything they don't think is going to make money.

They think we're stupid. Maybe we are for publishing something we know is going to lose money.

FOUR COLOR: DC seems to have attracted every old pro except for Stan Lee! Was this intentional?

GIORDANO: We've written to Stan Lee! Really. Denny [O'Neil] did. He jotted off a

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note. He had met Stan when he was in New York a little while ago and said, "If you're still interested in writing we have a place for you!"

Getting back to your question, it was intentional in that it is our hope to become the best in the business. I don't mean necessarily in sales. We're trying to publish good comic books. We're trying to make it clear to the creative community that we're trying to publish good comic books. Those people who care about their craft will eventually gravitate towards the company they feel gives them an opportunity to do what they are capable of doing.

If it was intentional, it was kind of a sidebar to what our intentions are, to publish good comics.

Let me hasten to point out that we don't offer the best deal in town. John Byrne didn't come here because of money. As a matter of fact, he considered the possibility of taking a loss of income to come and do **Superman**. And that has been more or less true with everyone else. Almost everybody is in this business because they enjoy writing, drawing, lettering or coloring comic books. The amount of money you make here is not an overwhelming reason to be in this business. Therefore, the enjoyment you get from it becomes more and more critical as time goes by. I like to believe that more of the people are coming here because they have a greater ability to enjoy themselves working here.

The short explanation for that, we're creative-driven Marvel and most of the other companies are editor-driven. Creative people here have a great deal to say with what they do.

FOUR COLOR How has 1986 been for DC? What are you very proud of?

GIORDANO: I'm very proud of the turn around this company has made in the last few years. It's what I came here to do so I'm proud of whatever contribution I made to that. I'm proud at putting out comic books and not having to be ashamed of any of them. I'm proud of people noticing that when we do something clever, we've done something clever. I like people to understand what we do and why we're doing it. And I like that happening without us putting out a lot of press releases and do PR work to convince people that we're good.

I like the fact that people say, "Hey, **'Mazing Man** is a nice title." It's not going to make any money but it's a good comic book. Conversely, I want people to understand that **Dark Knight** is a piece of work and **Watchmen** is something you're not going to see again. It hasn't been seen in this business before and it's going to be hard to duplicate. I've got a hard year to follow, guys. When you asked me that question before it's going to be very difficult for me to tell you what's going to follow this.

I like to believe we have a good, talented crew of editorial people here, with the addition of Mike Carlin. In my humble opinion I now have the best editorial staff in the business, bar none. I don't have to worry on that score.

FOUR COLOR: What do you see as DC's weaknesses? What do you feel needs to be worked on in the next year?

GIORDANO: Improving the line books. I think we have a good handle on doing **Dark Knight** or the next **Dark Knight**. I think we have to go back and make the regular books better.

In the case of 'Mazing Man, we all liked it so much we wanted to publish it. It was a labor of love, on the part of the creative people and on the part of the company. We endorsed and supported the project knowing from day one that we weren't going to make money on it.

You may notice, of course, that in order to do these revitalizations we've taken the top talent and poured them into the revitalizations. What we need to do in order to make the line books better is develop new talent. There isn't any talent around that we don't already have or have access to. We have everybody who is really good tied up for at least 18 months. So that means we have to develop new people to develop the line titles.

I said a moment ago we're creator-driven. I'm not going to improve the titles and my editors can't do it by themselves. We can do it when we luck into a Kevin McGuire for **Justice League**. I mean, he literally walked in the door with samples and got a job. That has never happened while I've been here, except for that one time.

FOUR COLOR: How would you say DC differs from its competition? Would you be specific why DC is unique in the market say from Marvel or the independents?

GIORDANO: People. We've got the best people We've got the people who care most about comic books. I don't want to sound like sloganeering but people do make the difference. That's what our company is based on.

FOUR COLOR: What are your responsibilities as executive editor?

GIORDANO: There was a time not too long ago where I described the job as part baby-sitter, part zoo-keeper. I suspect both of those elements are still part of the job. It is kind of hard to define what an executive editor does. I don't even know what an executive editor means! Essentially, I guess, the buck stops here, I'm responsible for everything between the covers. In the course of a day I might make a decision as mundane as where the credit line should go. On the other hand, I put every one of the projects on-line. I read projects for '87. In some cases I ordered them, in some cases I approved them but every publishing decision we make starts here. I can sometimes be shut down by Jenette [Kahn]. I can sometimes be asked by Jenette for another one to be put in but the decisions start in this office. **Dark Knight** started because Frank [Miller] and I had a conversation. **Watchmen** started because Alan [Moore] and I had a conversation. We can go on down the line with that.

As for **Superman** with John Byrne, a year ago last June John moved to Connecticut. I also live in Connecticut. He sent me an invitation to his house-warming party. I went over as the only representative from DC Comics, everyone else there was from Marvel. We talked a little bit. As the party was winding down, I found myself on a porch away from where the rest of the people were. John came out and said, "Hey, what about the character with the big red S on it?" I said, "You ready to talk?" He said yes. **Man of Steel** and **Superman** came out of that conversation.

I go to the west coast every two months and meet with the free-lancers we have there. We have 40 people who contribute to our line of comic books that live in California. That's what an executive editor does. I also go to conventions. I'm pointman for the company. I also talk to people who want to know a little bit about the company.

On some days I'm just an inker.

FOUR COLOR: Is there anything else you'd like to add to the interview?

GIORDANO: Thank you and good afternoon! Everyone expects me to do that! **Brandon Twine co-interviewed Giordano. Joe Cicala and Paul Haber contributed questions for the interview.**

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The Comic Distribution Experts

By Barry Dutter

on the racks

It started when I was in junior high. It happened slowly at first, so slowly that I didn't even realize what was happening.

It began with a few **Hulks**, a few **Captain Americas**. From there it went on to the group books and all the Spider-titles. This led to all the mutant books, and the next thing you knew, I was hooked.

I had become...a letter-hack.

Looking back now, I can view the whole thing from a distance but at the time, I was too caught up in it to approach the situation rationally. There was no stopping me. Every chance I got, I took pen in hand. There is no denying it–I was hooked.

When I first started collecting comics, I never wrote any letters to the letters pages. I was content to sit back and let my fellow readers speak out for me. But as I got older, I felt the need for my own voice to be heard.

So I would send in one letter about every few months or so. Then I started to write more frequently. I found I had something to say, for better or worse, about more and more comics. Finally, I decided I would send out a letter on every comic that I read which I had an opinion on.

And I had opinions on **lots** of comics. It reached the point where I was sending out at least one letter a day, I couldn't stop myself, I just had to get my thoughts down on paper.

I didn't find out about the first letter of mine to see print until months later. It was in an issue of **Ghost Rider**. In the letter, I expressed my disapproval of the direction the book was taking. This dissatisfaction eventually led me to drop the book.

Months later, a friend showed me the issue and I thought it was kind of neat. I had been immortalized. After that, my letters began to appear with greater and greater frequency, often with as many as two or three being printed a week.

It reached the point where every time I opened up a comic, the first thing I'd check would be the letters page to see if I was on it (which often I was). In no time at all, I soon became one of the premier letter-hacks in the country.

Look out, T.M. Maple, I had arrived.

By my count, I've had about 60 letters published all in all, either in comics, magazines, or comics-related publications. Most of the comics were Marvels, though I eventually branched out and wrote to DC and some of the alternative companies. I never did write to **Archie**, though.

When I was growing up, I had heard stories about what editors can do to Letters of Comment (or LoCs), how they could butcher them to twist their meaning, though I never really had this happen to me. The worst they would do is change the wording sometimes.

For instance, in one issue of **Spectacular Spider-Man**, I commented that a character displayed a good deal of bravery. When the letter saw print, it was altered to, "That really took a lot of gumption."

Now I don't know about you, but "gumption" is not a word that I use too often in everyday speech. In fact, I don't think I've **ever** used it. Somehow I found myself being given credit for writing it.

One of the more interesting anecdotes from my career as a letter-hack was the Gruenwald-Fingeroth feud. Mark Gruenwald and Danny Fingeroth were two editors at Marvel who had a good-natured feud going on in their letters pages. They used to respond to people's letters (often mine) by taking cheap swipes at each other.

For instance, in **Spectacular Spider-Man #91**, I had a LoC printed that read, in part, "the bit about the Fly eating garbage was one of the more disgusting things I've ever seen a super villain do." Editor Fingeroth's reply? "Really, Barry? Then you've obviously never seen some of the things...Mark Gruenwald does in his office when he thinks no one is looking. Take our word for it. It's more disgusting than just about anything you can imagine."

As long as the two were feuding, I figured an easy way to get letters printed would be to play along. I decided I would send a pro-Gruenwald letter to Gruenwald and a pro-Fingeroth letter to Fingeroth. The next month I would send anti-letters to both.

Unfortunately I goofed and sent pro-Greunwald letters to both. Poor Danny Fingeroth got raked over the coals twice in one month. In **Amazing Spider-Man 260**, I criticized Fingeroth's editorial skills, calling them "some of the worst I've ever seen." I then went on to praise his rival, saying, "Fingeroth could really learn a thing or two about editing from Mark Gruenwald."

That same month, over in **Captain America #301**, I had high priase for Gruenwald, calling him "the best editor ever created in the history of Marvel." I poured it on thick, adding that "when I get married and have children some day, I will name every one of them Mark, even the girls."

In their responses to my letters, both

Fingeroth and Gruenwald decided that their "feud" had gone on long enough and called a truce. Too bad–I had written a bunch more letters to add fuel to the fire.

Perhaps my greatest claim to fame as a letter-hack is from my campaigns to rid the Marvel Universe of the She-Hulk. When the character first appeared, I set myself up as president of a committee to get her comic cancelled because I found her degrading and an insult to Marvel.

During the run of her comic, me and my committee-members had three letters printed in her book (though I can assure you, we wrote far more than that). I like to think that our efforts had something to do with the cancellation of the **She-Hulk** comic.

Our celebration didn't last long as the character was tragically rescued from limbo to become a member of, get this, the Avengers! My friends and I could not believe it! Surely this had to be a joke. So a new committee was formed, to get this poor excuse for a character out of our favorite group.

Much to our delight, She-Hulk eventually did leave the **Avengers**, only to join the **Fantastic Four**! There had to be a conspiracy at work! And so, a new committee was formed, rising like a phoenix from the ashes of the old. Still we continued swamping Marvel Comics with letters, demanding that She-Hulk be kicked out of the book.

Marvel never acknowledged the existence of our committee. Finally, in **Fantastic Four #270**, an anonymous reader wrote in saying that Marvel shouldn't listen to me. The person signed him/herself, "President of the Society to keep the She-Hulk in **F.F.** Forever."

It was only after that letter that the **F.F.** editor finally printed one of mine, in which I got to respond to the anonymous She-Hulk lover. That was in **F.F. #273**.

Meanwhile, over in **Comics Interview** magazine, I had a bunch of anti-She-Hulk letters printed, largely because **C.I.** editor Dave Kraft remembered me from the days when he wrote the Green Woman's book. Those letters got some **C.I.** readers very upset, leading to some ugly fighting in the letter pages of that mag.

All I had ever wanted to do with those letters was make people laugh, but some people really took them the wrong way. Fortunately, Dave Kraft was on my side. He sent me a post card reading, "I thought your letters were funny!"

John Byrne sent me a card, too. I had asked Byrne, who was writer and artist of the **Fantastic Four** at the time, for an interview for the **Comics Buyer's Guide**. Byrne's reply: "She-Hulk says I shouldn't talk to you."

It was Byrne who had the last word on the subject in **F.F. #284**, in which She-Hulk battled a villain know as "Dutta." Dutta tortured She-Hulk for a few pages, but then she got the best of him. Her victory cry, "Dutta–SHUT UP!"

As long as the two were feuding, I figured an easy wasy to get letters printed would be to play along. I decided I would send a pro-Gruenwald letter to Gruenwald and a pro-Fingeroth letter to Fingeroth. The next month I would send anti-letters to both.

So all my letter-writing did pay off. It got me an appearance in a Marvel Comic, which I thought was kind of neat. Even though I lost the fight, I didn't mind. I know Dutta will be back for revenge some day.

These days, I really don't write that many letters any more. I've overcome my addiction, kicked the habit. Most comics just don't motivate me to pick up the ol' pen. I still send out a letter every couple of weeks or so, but it's not like it used to be.

My days as a letter-hack are behind me.

In a way, I kind of miss them. But there comes a time when you have to move on to other kinds of writing. It all worked out in the end. I'm spending a lot less money on stamps these days.

FC

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